



## THE LORD OF MISRULE

WHEN CHRISTMAS TURNED  
THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

THE RESURRECTION MEN ON THE TRAIL OF BURKE AND HARE  
A WARNING TO THE CURIOUS THE BBC'S PROBLEM WITH GHOSTS  
MURDER MYSTERY WHO KILLED CHARLES FORT'S PUBLISHER?

TWO-HEADED SNAKES • SATANIC CONSPIRACY • DUPPY LIZARD • DEMONIC THREESOME

THE WORLD OF

STRANGE PHENOMENA

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# ForteanTimes

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SPECIAL  
400TH  
ISSUE

# WITNESSED

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ACCOUNTS OF  
THE WEIRD &  
THE WONDERFUL  
FROM THE  
FT ARCHIVES

IN SEARCH OF  
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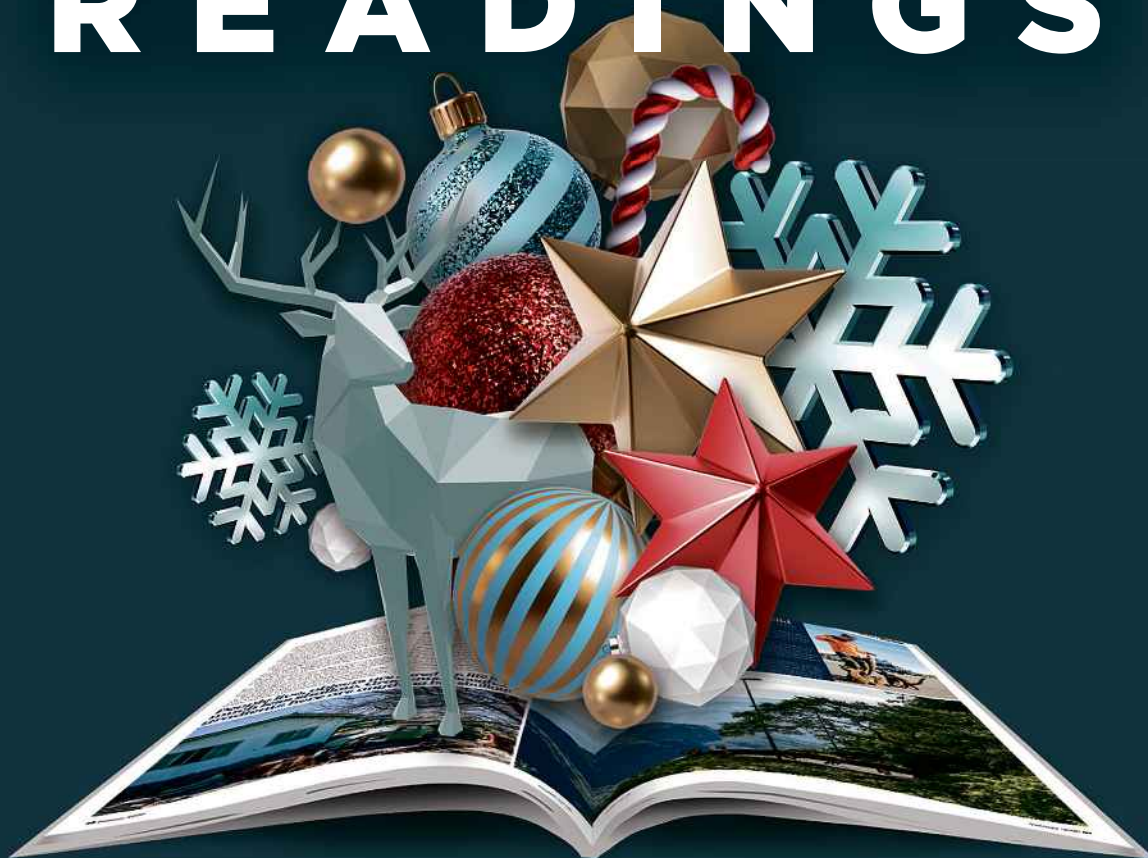
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THE GRATEFUL DEAD AND  
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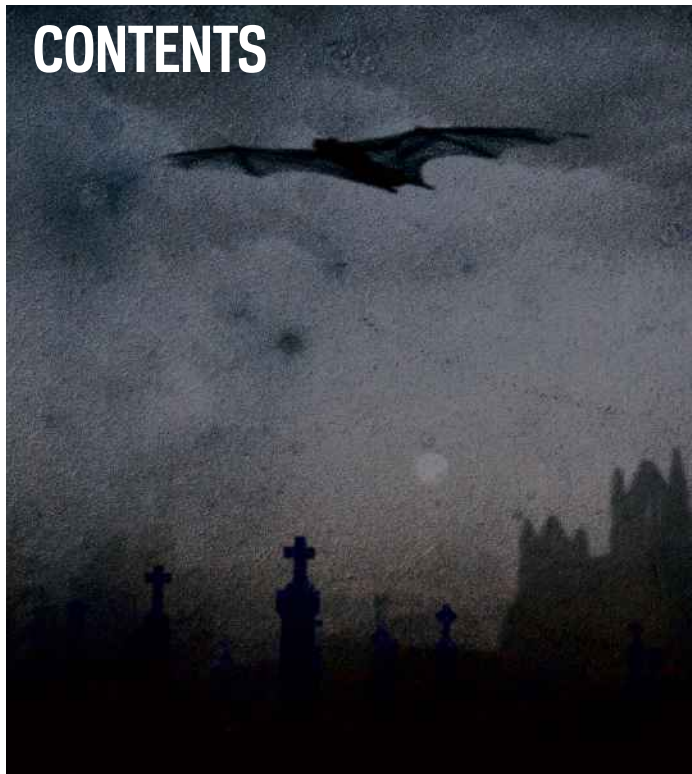
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# EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

## A FESTIVE 400TH



by Covid-19, Therese Taylor takes us back to a largely forgotten and explicitly carnivalesque festive tradition in which the upending of the everyday order was precisely the point – is it time we revived the brief reign of the Lord of Misrule, she asks (p.48). One consequence of 2020 being so

We're not sure that any of us expected to one day be looking at a continuous 400-issue run of *Fortean Times*, but here we are, at the end of what has been a difficult year for everyone, at just such a landmark. If there's one thing we can offer thanks for at this point, it's the incredible loyalty and support of FT readers, who have not only got us to the 400-issue line but have helped keep us sane throughout 2020 with encouraging messages, cheering Tweets, kind words and, of course, some of the best letters to be found in any magazine anywhere. So to celebrate our 400th issue, we've chosen to focus on some of these; for our cover feature (p.34), we present a (necessarily small) selection of the letters we have received offering personal accounts of often bafflingly strange, and sometimes spooky, experiences. There's nothing we enjoy more than receiving these first-hand accounts from the frontline of high strangeness – please, keep them coming in 2021! (As an aside, we note that three of the letters included here refer to bizarre eight-foot tall figures – it leads us to wonder if there is some sort of minimum height requirement for otherworldly entities).

We also look back at another major contribution by FT readers – the Fortean Times Message Board, delivering high strangeness and *simpatico* chat since 2001. Turn to p.46, where longtime FTMB admin Stu Neville offers a brief history of this much-loved fortorean institution, which while no longer hosted by us continues to thrive at [forums.forteana.org/](http://forums.forteana.org/).

Meanwhile, as we face a strange Christmas in a world turned upside down

comprehensively upside-downed has been the cancellation of virtually all fortorean public events. Rob Gandy is currently collating new dates for postponed events (send details of any you are aware of to [rob.gandy@ntlworld.com](mailto:rob.gandy@ntlworld.com)) and we'll be bringing you the latest updates next issue... where Lisa Gledhill will also be offering advice to the 'Armchair Fortean Traveller' on the best online experiences to be had in 2021. Until then – we wish you a Happy Christmas and a fortorean New Year.

### GETTING COPIES OF FT

Despite current lockdown measures, you should be able to buy FT from your usual stockist. If you are experiencing difficulties, or cannot go out, then copies for home delivery, including recent issues you may have missed, can be ordered here: <https://magsdirect.co.uk/magazine-category/entertainment/fortean/>. Taking out a subscription is the best way to guarantee your regular FT fix; if you are able to support us in this way, then turn to p.58 for the latest offers.

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# TRAD

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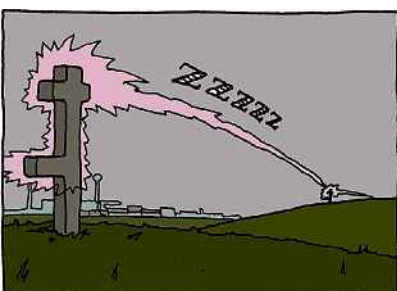
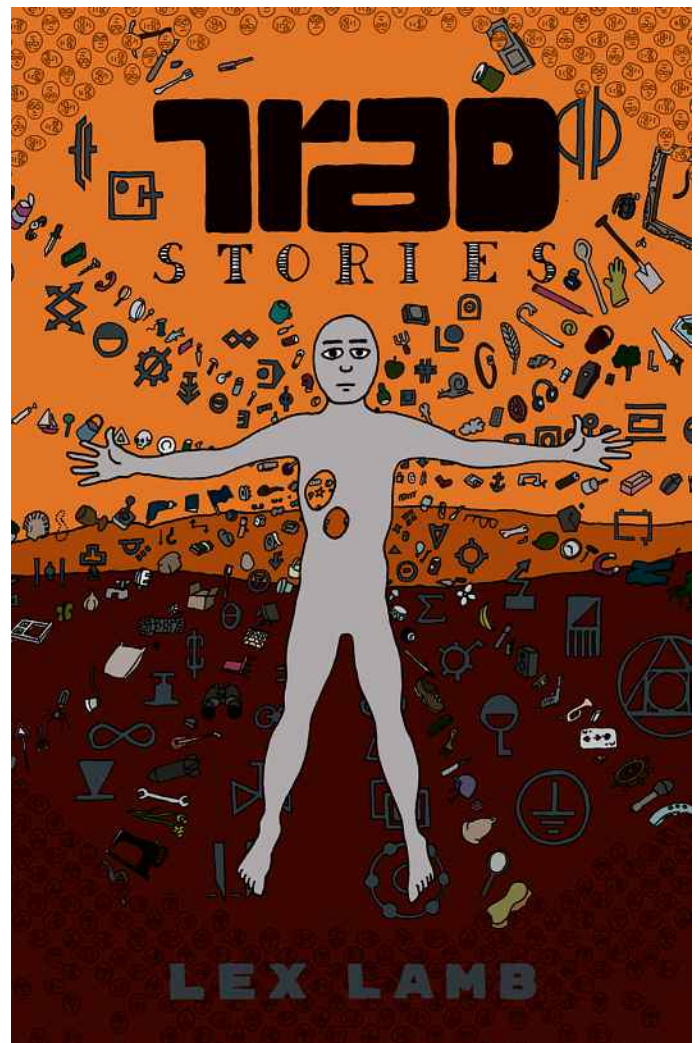
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# STRANGE DAYS

## THE DEVIL FINDS WORK...

More allegations of a worldwide conspiracy of Satanist paedophiles

### THRONE OF BAAL

Over 70 artworks and ancient artefacts housed in Berlin museums and galleries were vandalised in October 2020 in what appears to be an organised attack on “global Satanism”. The priceless objects included Egyptian sarcophagi, stone sculptures and 19th-century paintings held at the Pergamon Museum, the Alte Nationalgalerie and the Neues Museum on Berlin’s famous Museumsinsel. The attacks, news of which were kept from the public for over two weeks, occurred on 3 October and employed an “oily substance”. The Pergamon Museum is apparently regarded by some as the centre of the “global Satanism scene” because it has a reconstruction of the ancient Greek Pergamon Altar on display (see **FT260:46-48** for the full story).

There is a possible precedent for such attacks; in 2018 two women were arrested in Greece after smearing museum exhibits at the National Museum of History, Athens, with an “oily substance”. The two Bulgarian women told police they had sprayed the artworks with oil and myrrh “because the Holy Scripture says it is miraculous”. Christ, myrrh, or holy anointing oil is used by numerous Christian denominations when administering sacraments such as baptism or ordination.

German media have linked the Museum Island attack to recent conspiracy theories disseminated by prominent coronavirus deniers via social media. Attila Hildmann is a



ABOVE: A cross-looking Attila Hildman, who has accused Angela Merkel of using the Pergamon altar for human sacrifices. Fact!

former vegan celebrity chef and now one of Germany’s best-known proponents of QAnon. In August and September, he posted messages on his public Telegram channel (Telegram is a cloud-based instant messaging service that encrypts messages to prevent them from being read by a third party) suggesting that Angela Merkel had been using the Pergamon altar for “human sacrifices”. Hildmann, who has over 100,000 Telegram followers wrote: “Fact! It is the throne of Baal (Satan)”. *Guardian*, 20 Oct 2020.

### QANON AND ON

Advocates of QAnon claim that a Satanic child-murdering paedophile sex cult is being coordinated by Hollywood actors and other ‘global elite’ figures like Hillary Clinton, but which current president Donald Trump is fighting against.

The QAnon conspiracy theory was cited at a House intelligence

committee hearing in October, “Misinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and ‘Infodemics’: Stopping the Spread Online”. Experts testified before Congress that the spread of online misinformation and conspiracy theories had contributed to what they called “a threat that is dismantling democracy” as well as instigating real-world violence. Melanie Smith, head of analysis at Graphika Inc., a network analysis firm that employs data science to study social networks, identified QAnon as “the most pressing threat to trust in government, public institutions and democratic processes. The real reason QAnon poses a threat,” she said, “is in its systematic undermining of facts and truths on topics of genuine concern, such as the integrity of elections, human trafficking and the global COVID-19 pandemic.” She also sought to dispel the misconception that

QAnon had been fuelled or infiltrated by foreign actors and was driven by bots or fake accounts, instead arguing that it “does appear to be a homegrown movement that engages real users.” As well as QAnon, concern was expressed about ‘Covid-sceptics’ and coronavirus misinformation leading to a lack of confidence in health experts’ recommendations.

October’s hearing followed YouTube’s recent action, preceded by that of Facebook and Twitter, in banning QAnon content. In the recent US election, Republican businesswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene was elected a Congresswoman to represent northwest Georgia. She has described the mythical ‘Q’, the supposed leader/whistleblower at the heart of QAnon, as a “patriot” who is “worth listening to”. Among her other pronouncements are: Holocaust survivor George Soros collaborated with the Nazis; the 2017 White supremacist rally at Charlottesville was an “inside job” to “further the agenda of the elites”; and White males are “the most mistreated group of people in the United States today”.

Donald Trump himself had been flagged in recent months by Twitter and Facebook for spreading misinformation, including a claim that he was now “immune” from Covid-19 following his hospitalisation and recovery. Since his election defeat, Trump’s tweets have frequently been flagged with the warning messages “This claim about election fraud is disputed”. His 16 November tweet “I won the Election!” was tagged with the cautionary notice “Multiple sources called this election differently”. [UPI] 6, 15 Oct; wfsb.com, 4 Nov 2020.



## BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

A medal for a mine-detecting rat

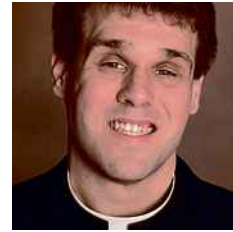
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## RUM TALES OF JAMAICA

Curses, snake venom and a duppy lizard

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## UNHOLY PASSIONS

Louisiana priest in 'demonic' altar threesome

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# YEAR OF THE TWO-HEADED SNAKE

2020 is turning out to be a bumper year for bicephalic serpents



ABOVE: Dos, the two-headed Southern black racer dragged in by Kay Rogers's cat Olive.

Florida wildlife officials are looking after a two-headed snake brought in by a Ms Kay Rogers, after the cat had dragged the small, speckled snake into her Palm Harbor home in October. It was later identified as a juvenile Southern black racer (*Coluber constrictor priapus*), a small, nonvenomous snake commonly found in the southeastern United States.

It had been captured by Olive, the family cat, and was named Dos (Spanish for 'two'); each head is able to move its eyes, neck and tongue independently, and Dos has two brains and two throats. "His biggest problem is eating," Ms Rogers had posted on Facebook: "We are trying lots of things, but he has trouble coordinating his two heads."

Dos is now being cared for by Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission after Ms Rogers handed him over to them following their warning that he would be unlikely to survive if released

into the wild. His pair of independent, competing brains make it difficult to eat and escape from predators.

The condition, known as bicephaly, is a relatively rare abnormality that occurs during embryonic development, when identical twins fail to fully separate. The condition has been observed in all sorts of animals, including deer and porpoises.

Living bicephalic snakes are usually encountered by humans only once a year. In 2019, a bicephalic baby rattlesnake (later christened Double-Dave) was spotted in New Jersey, while a two-headed viper slithered onto a family's property in Virginia in 2018.

But in 2020, Dos has a bicephalic rival in the form of Double Trouble, a young rat snake found in September by

Jeannie Wilson of Taylorsville, Alexander County, in North Carolina. She told a local TV station how she had come across the one-foot long (30cm) reptile while cleaning her conservatory. "I saw something in the corner of my eye, and I said, 'Lord, that's a snake!'" The first thing I thought was, 'Oh gosh, something has stepped on you and mashed your head'." She says Double Trouble is "very gentle to handle" and has never tried to bite her. She took the snake to the Catawba Science Centre in Hickory, where staff identified him as a four-month-old member of the rat snake family, and emphasised the rarity of Ms Wilson's find: only one in 100,000 baby rat snakes will have two heads. *Independent*, 13 Oct; *[UPI]* 22 Oct; *livescience.com*, 27 Oct 2020.

## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

**TOP ZOO OFFICIAL SHOT DEAD WHILE PROBING MISSING ALBINO BARKING DEER**

Southern Thailand News, 4 Oct 2020.

**Smelly durian fruit forces evacuation of Bavarian post office**

theguardian.com, 23 June 2020.

**THREE DIE AS MARAUDING PAKISTAN LAWYERS RAMPAGE THROUGH CARDIAC HOSPITAL**

telegraph.co.uk, 11 Dec 2019.

**Loose ass costs Mississippi woman \$2 million**

Delta Daily News, 22 Aug 2019.

**VULTURES BAN IN CAR PARKS**

Sun on Sunday, 3 Nov 2019.

FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

# SAVED BY THE WHALE!



A train driver in Spijkenisse on the outskirts of Rotterdam had a lucky escape when his metro train crashed through a barrier at the end of the tracks. Instead of plummeting 10m (33ft) into the water below, the train was left suspended in mid-air, having collided with an art installation – a large sculpture of two whales' tails emerging from the water at the De Akkers metro station. The sculpture was originally titled *Whale Tails*, but has now been renamed *Saved by a Whale's Tail* by the local authority. It was created by architect and artist Maarten Struijs and was installed in

the water beneath the elevated metro line in 2002.

Mr Struijs was surprised the structure did not break. "It has been there for almost 20 years," he said. "You actually expect the plastic to pulverise a bit, but that is apparently not the case. I am amazed that it is so strong. When plastic has stood for 20 years, you don't expect it to hold up a metro train."

The unnamed driver was able to leave the empty train by himself, and was taken to hospital for a check-up but fortunately appears to have escaped any injuries. The

train was travelling just before midnight and was therefore empty, so no passengers were involved either. "We are trying to decide how we can bring the train down in a careful and controlled manner," said an official. "Given the complexity, this will take some time. It will be quite an exercise to get that thing off and get it safe." *Guardian*, *BBC News*, 2 Nov 2020.

Photos: This page: Robin Utrecht/ANP/AFP via Getty Images. Opposite top: Jeffrey Groeneweg ANP/AFP via Getty Images; opposite bottom: Niels Wenstedt/BSR Agency/Getty Images.



## SIDELINES...

### AIR ARM

A one-armed man crashed his plane after a DIY prosthetic limb became detached mid-flight. The 69-year-old amputee, formerly a doctor specialising in prosthetics, had created a homemade device to replace his missing left forearm, but this became disconnected from the controls while the plane was around 5ft (1.5m) above ground. The pilot was uninjured but his Jodel D117A light aircraft was damaged. He has subsequently attached the prosthetic limb to the control column with a Velcro strip. *D.Mail*, 17 Apr 2020.

### MERSEY CLOWN TERROR

A "creepy thug" wearing a black-and-white clown outfit chased two frightened young girls through a Liverpool park, jumping out from behind a bush before laughing hysterically like "something out of the movies". The two girls, both aged 12, were walking in Liverpool's Walton Hall Park around 9pm when the incident took place, telling police their ordeal began with the man saying "Hi" and holding a "shiny" object. *dailyrecord.co.uk*, 11 Aug 2020.

### COVID PARTIES

City officials in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, report that students have been organising "Covid parties" at which they intentionally infect each other. "They put money in a pot, and they try to get Covid," Tuscaloosa City Councillor Sonya McKinstry told *USA Today*. "Whoever gets Covid first gets the pot. It makes no sense." *Knoxville (TN) News Sentinel*, 3 July 2020.

## COVID CORNER | Denmark's mink mutation, lawyer's masturbatory mishap, plus cats in circles



**ABOVE:** Culled mink on a Danish farm are placed on mobile shelves to await refrigeration and incineration; others are being buried in mass graves on military land. **BELOW:** Legal expert Jeffrey Toobin – caught with his pants down in a Zoom work call.

### COVID VS MINK

Mink are the latest victims of the coronavirus. Utah ranchers have lost at least 8,000 of the ferret-like animals, farmed for their silky, luxurious pelts. Utah's state veterinarian Dean Taylor said the virus was first detected in the mink in August, shortly after some farmworkers fell ill with Covid-19. Initial research indicates transmission of the virus from humans to animals; so far there have been no cases suggesting the opposite.

This is the first outbreak among mink in the United States, though other cases have been detected in Denmark, the Netherlands and Spain. Denmark is the world's biggest producer of mink fur, its main export markets being China and Hong Kong. At the end of October, the Danish government began culling mink held in its fur farms after a mutated form of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes the Covid-19 disease) was found in some animals. It was feared this mutation could jeopardise a future vaccine's effectiveness, and Denmark plans to eradicate all 17 million of the unfortunate mammals. In a statement to

### Toobin exposed himself in a Zoom call with colleagues

the Danish parliament on 10 November, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen admitted there was no legal basis for such a mass cull, and promised that her government will now put forward the required legislation. In the meantime, agriculture minister Mogens Jensen has urged all mink farmers to go ahead with the cull as a precautionary measure.

Mink, closely related to weasels, otters and ferrets, appear to suffer similar symptoms to humans, but with a more rapid morbidity. It is believed the animals became infected via farm workers during the pandemic, occasionally passing the virus back to them, with the potential for introducing new viral mutations

in humans. So far, the mutated form of the virus has been found in 12 people. Breathing difficulties and crusting around the eyes are typically seen in mink, but the illness progresses swiftly, with most infected animals being dead the next day. It is as yet unclear what makes them susceptible to coronavirus while other species appear to be unaffected. The only other animals known to have been infected (in the USA, at least) are cats, dogs, a tiger and a lion. *editions.cnn.com*, 9 Oct; *BBC News*, 5, 10 Nov 2020.

### NOT SAFE FOR WORK

The *New Yorker* magazine has suspended one of its senior staff writers, legal expert Jeffrey Toobin, pending investigation of a report that he was seen masturbating during a Zoom work call. "I made an embarrassingly stupid mistake, believing I was off-camera," said 60-year-old Toobin. "I apologise to my wife, family, friends and co-workers. I thought I had muted the Zoom video. I thought no one on the Zoom call could see me".

The Zoom call, with





the participation of both *New Yorker* staff and those from WNYC (a New York City and metropolitan area radio station), was reportedly an election simulation in which senior *New Yorker* staff played Republicans, Democrats, Trump, Biden, the far right, left wing Democrats, and the military. Jeffrey Toobin took the part of the courts. At one point, he allegedly joined in the call, unaware that his camera was still turned on (as indeed was he) and focused on his penis. Some observers have suggested he was engaged in another call to a different party while unaware he was still connected to the *New Yorker* call.

Fellow broadcaster Brian Stelter defended his CNN colleague, tweeting “Jeffrey Toobin has been sidelined at a pivotal moment in the run-up to the presidential election. The reason: He exposed himself during a Zoom call with *New Yorker* colleagues in what he says was an accident.” Some Twitter users then criticised Stelter’s defence, querying how a person could masturbate by accident.

Toobin is one of the USA’s highest-profile media legal analysts. He has been at the *New Yorker* for over 25 years, and is also a senior legal analyst at CNN, who issued their own statement saying that Toobin “has asked for some time off while he deals with a personal issue, which we have granted.” An unnamed but allegedly “well-placed” CNN source believes Toobin will be brought back after the affair has “blown over”. The married legal analyst is no stranger to scandal, having had a decade-long affair with a fellow lawyer, offering to pay for her to have an abortion when she became pregnant in 2008. When she gave birth the following year, Toobin reportedly failed to pay the full child support amount as ordered by a family court, and had to be compelled to do so by his lover’s lawyer, who threatened to reveal the whole story to Toobin’s employers. Toobin also caused a stir when he told a reporter he had visited a leading Florida swinger’s club, Miami Velvet, in order to interview the US conservative political consultant,

lobbyist and convicted felon Roger Stone.

Zoom, the online video conferencing and conversation service, has been used extensively this year with so many people working from home, shielding or self-isolating. It allows large groups of people to talk together on a single call, and, if they wish, be visible on video. Users have the option to mute their microphone when not speaking and to switch off the camera if they don’t wish to be seen. A number of embarrassing or unexpected mistakes have been reported. Public figures have reportedly been seen showering during meetings, thinking they had turned off their camera and sound. An office worker was observed having sex with his partner during a work call. A woman took her laptop into the lavatory while she answered

a call of nature, unaware she was broadcasting the entire proceedings to her work colleagues. Most dramatically, participants of an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting conducted via Zoom apparently witnessed a man stab his father to death in May (FT397:11). *D.Mail*, 22 May; *vice.com*, 19 Oct; *Guardian*, 20 Oct; *Sun* 19 Oct; *the-sun.com*, 20 Oct 2020.

## CAT SOCIAL DISTANCING

White circles painted one metre (3ft) apart on the pavement outside a shop to encourage human social distancing in Quezon City, north-east of Manila in the Philippines, were instead occupied by several stray cats. As many pet ‘owners’ know, cats often seek out small, tight spaces, and sometimes like to remain inside squares or circles marked on the ground. *thenewdaily.com.au*, 14 May 2020.



ABOVE: The feline inhabitants of Manila have no problem following the rules.

## SIDELINES...

### JACKPOT

A one-armed bandit player in a Bochum arcade was questioned by police, who discovered there was a warrant out for his arrest. The 37-year-old German had previously been ordered to pay a €710 fine or face 71 days’ imprisonment. As the officers went to cuff him, the machine he’d been playing suddenly paid out a €1,000 cash jackpot, allowing him to pay off the fine in full. (*Sydney D.Telegraph*; (*Portsmouth*) *News*, 27 Sept 2014.

### NO CRIB FOR A BED

A homeless man sleeping on an Ohio park bench and reported to police was actually a sculpture of Jesus intended to raise awareness of homelessness. Within 20 minutes of the statue’s installation by St Barnabas Episcopal Church in Bay Village, Cleveland, a police officer showed up after a tip-off from a concerned citizen. *Miami Herald*, 16 Oct 2020.

### LOFT LIVING

Police arrested a man after he was found living in the ceiling of a grocery store. Matthew Hammar, 35, had fallen through the roof tiles and remained in the crawlspace for at least two days, sustaining himself by stealing food when the shop, in Fernley, Nevada, was closed for the night. *kolotv.com*, 17 Oct 2020.

### LICHEN VIAGRA PERIL

New Zealanders have been warned not to eat a “sexy pavement lichen”, a green fungus growing on footpaths, tree trunks and rocks, which has been promoted online as a natural alternative to Viagra. Although *Xanthoparmelia scabrosa* may have stimulatory properties, scientists warn it may also contain pollutants like faeces, car exhaust fumes, lead, mercury and arsenic. <i>, 16 Aug 2019.

### THE ASCENT OF MAN

Essex firefighters rescued three men who were stuck in a tumble dryer. They were called to a derelict laundry in Bower Hill, Epping, after the men, in their late teens, had crawled into an industrial-sized dryer. Two were in the drum when the third’s “ankles became trapped in the door” as he crawled in. *BBC News*, 31 Oct 2020.

COLEEN JOICE AQUINO / FACEBOOK



## SIDELINES...

### BIG BLUEBERRY

An Australian couple were awarded a Guinness World Record for growing the world's heaviest blueberry, which weighs 0.57 ounces (16g). The giant berry, grown by David and Leasa Mazzardis, has a diameter of 1.4in (3.5cm). *upi.com*, 5 Oct 2020.

### MYSTERY CASE(S)

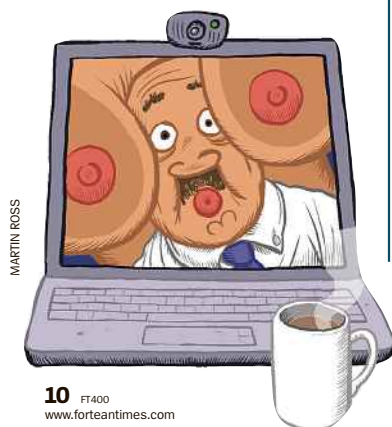
Fifty people carrying suitcases were spotted walking towards Ardingly Reservoir near Balcombe, Sussex. Police were called to the popular fishing spot, but were unable to find anything untoward. "An area search was carried out and the team could not locate anyone with suitcases," said Inspector Darren Taylor. "Most bizarre." *The Argus (Brighton)*, 26 June 2020.

### LONG STRANGE TRIP

A Utah man allegedly stole a red pickup truck from a 7-Eleven store so he could rendezvous with aliens, but subsequently felt guilty and returned it. Bryce Jerald Dixon is accused of theft of a vehicle and three attempts to escape from official custody. He told police he needed the truck so that he could "get to the Colosseum to get on a flight with alien diplomats". He was treated for an injury sustained when the truck owner allegedly punched him in the face. *kutv.com*, 28 Sept 2020.

### CONGRESSMAN'S BOOB

An Argentine politician was forced to resign after being seen kissing his girlfriend's bare breasts during an online congressional debate transmitted live on the parliamentary YouTube channel. Juan Emilio Ameri told reporters that his girlfriend, who has had recent breast augmentation surgery, entered the room when he thought he was offline. Wanting to see how the implants looked, he called her over. "I kissed her tits, and that was all," he explained. *Guardian*, 25 Sept 2020.



## ANIMAL ROUND-UP | Hero rat, mad wolf, gull vs drone and MAGA raccoon attacks



PDSA

ABOVE: Magawa the mine-detecting rat poses proudly with his PDSA Gold Medal, awarded for "life-saving devotion to duty".

### HERO RAT

Magawa, an African giant pouched rat, has been awarded a gold medal for "life-saving devotion to duty" by UK animal charity People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA). The PDSA Gold Medal was initiated in 2002 to honour and reward significant acts of courage and devotion to duty by animals, the highest honour recognising extraordinary animal bravery.

Magawa is a mine-detecting rat. He was trained by the Belgium-registered charity APOPO who have been teaching rats to detect landmines since the early 1990s. There are an estimated 80 million landmines still active and unknown across the world. The African Giant Pouched Rat is much larger than standard-sized pet rats, but is still light enough to be able to walk over a landmine without setting it off. Magawa and his fellow 'HeroRATs' are considered easy to train, as their highly developed olfactory abilities allow them to detect landmines because of certain chemicals contained in the devices. Once they do so, they signal to their handler, who then disposes of the mines safely.

Magawa has been working in Cambodia, a country with

the highest number of mine amputees per capita in the world, a total of over 40,000 people. He has been working there for seven years and is able to search an area the size of a tennis court in about 30 minutes. A human armed with a metal detector would take four days to cover the same ground.

To date, Magawa has discovered over 39 landmines and 28 items of unexploded ordnance, and has cleared over 141,000 square metres of land (equivalent to the size of two football pitches), which makes him the charity's most successful HeroRAT.

Altogether, PDSA has honoured 30 animals for their heroic and selfless deeds. Last year, for example, Bacca, an English police dog, was given the award after helping to chase down a violent assailant. Bacca received eight wounds to his head and neck in the process. Magawa is the first rat upon whom the honour has been bestowed. *BBC News*; *D.Telegraph*, 25 Sept; *indiaexpress.com*, 26 Sept 2020.

### MAD BAD WOLF

A French marksman shot a "mad wolf" on 23 September as it attacked a herd of dairy cows in the Val d'Ajol sector, between

the Vosges and Haute-Saône départements. Since August it had killed over a dozen cows and 20 sheep during a month-long rampage across eastern France. The lone wolf was said to have displayed "atypical behaviour", even entering farmyard buildings to hunt its prey. Although wolves are a protected species in France, the sustained attacks and failure of deterrent measures led the authorities to authorise the shooting. *pledgetimes.com*, 23 Sept; *D.Telegraph*, 24 Sept 2020.

### SCHOOL SEAGULL SIEGE

A primary school in Kent is being targeted by a rogue gull attacking children and staff and leaving some of the latter with facial injuries. Minster Church of England primary school's head teacher Paul McCarthy has admitted to feeling helpless and powerless to prevent the renegade seabird's assaults. The RSPCA have suggested pupils and staff carry umbrellas with which to repel the airborne assaults; this, said a clearly frustrated Mr McCarthy, "wasn't a very practical piece of advice."

Minster, located near Ramsgate on the Isle of Thanet, has a recreation ground, play area and an all-weather pitch,



all of which have also been dive-bombed. "The bird has been terrorising residents over the whole of the summer holiday period with many attacks," said Mr McCarthy. "We have had an ongoing problem since the start of the academic year. One child was repeatedly pecked on their head and two members of staff have facial injuries from the bird's feet scratching at their faces." All the attacks, he claims, have been unprovoked. "It will literally dive-bomb people, appearing from nowhere making it very hard to prevent it happening," he explained.

The impact of Covid-19 and the necessity for children to distance themselves during playtime and lunchtime has added another level of stress. "If this wasn't tricky enough to manage with 400 pupils, I have then had this seagull putting a massive spanner in the works," sighed Mr McCarthy. "It seems crazy that a seagull is effectively holding the school hostage and that we can do nothing about it."

The seagull is thought to be a juvenile which had been hand-reared in the village and thus has no fear of humans, but, no longer being fed, has become aggressive. Wendy Vinson, another member of the school staff, has urged local people to report any further gull-related incidents to the parish council. The parish authority acknowledges having received gull reports, but says it doesn't have the power to take action. "There is nothing that Thanet District Council can do directly regarding seagulls attacking schoolchildren or other residents," a spokesman said. "If the children are eating their lunches or snacks in the playground, this is a potential source of interest for the seagulls that may be coming down to steal food." *kentonline.co.uk*, 22 Sept 2020.

## BANDIT AT THREE O'CLOCK

Meanwhile, a black-headed gull brought down a drone over a school in south west Scotland. The drone was carrying out a roof survey at Stranraer Academy in July when the attack occurred. An Air Accidents Investigation Branch report said the pilot had never before experienced the

"level of aggression" shown by the bird, which attacked the 6kg (13lb) drone, causing it to crash on the school roof and sustain substantial damage. The pilot had launched the drone, flying it manually before placing it in autonomous flight mode. However, at this point the gull chose to engage the enemy and launched its attack. The pilot tried to re-establish manual control, but a propeller had been damaged, causing the drone to fall onto the school roof. The report said the pilot had previously used the drone in locations where gulls were present and had been "cautious" while operating, especially during nesting season, but had been surprised by the aggressive behaviour of this individual gull. *BBC News*, 9 Oct 2020.

## WHITE HOUSE RACOONS

Departing US president Donald Trump was, of course, well-known for his excoriation of the mainstream news media and what he termed its 'fake news'. It now appears he had managed to enlist the aid of an aggressive raccoon, or possibly several raccoons, who engaged in repeated attacks on reporters at the White House during October, perhaps Trump's final assault against his foes before the presidential election the following month.

Just before he began recording a news segment, CNN senior Washington correspondent Joe Johns screamed at a vicious

raccoon that was biting him on camera. The video is worth seeking out. "Frickin' raccoons, man," says Johns after shouting at the raccoon and throwing what looks like a box in its direction. This wasn't the first time Johns had encountered one of the tough, bandit-masked beasts; another had jumped on his leg the previous week. Johns later tweeted that he had "heard one of the raccoons (pretty sure there are more than one) slipped into a WH guard shack last night... they're totally unafraid of people at this stage."

The week prior to that, CBS White House correspondent Paula Reid tweeted about raccoons attacking multiple news crews on the White House's North Lawn. Reid later reported that the White House grounds had placed a cage trap baited with marshmallow in an effort to capture the rogue raccoons, but these animals were evidently too smart. Reid examined the cage the next day, finding it empty of both raccoons and marshmallows.

There is a long and venerable history of raccoons visiting the White House, whether invited or not. The most famous was Rebecca, President Calvin Coolidge's pet raccoon. It remains to be seen whether Trump's attack raccoons will be left in place, Gladio-like, to give President Biden a warm welcome when he arrives at the White House in January 2021. *washingtonian.com*, 7 Oct 2020.



ABOVE: First Lady Grace Coolidge with Rebecca the Raccoon in 1926.

## SIDELINES...

### NATURAL FLAPPERS

Seals' well-known habit of clapping their flippers to make a noise has been shown to be a natural behaviour rather than a trick taught to captive animals. Newcastle University researchers filmed a male grey seal underwater, clapping loudly. It is thought to be a means of attracting mates and a warning to rivals, and was previously thought to have been a vocal sound. *D.Mail*, 3 Feb 2020.

### MASTER CRIMINAL

A burglar was found fast asleep next to a half-eaten cheesecake in the bar he had broken into. Police discovered Mark Cooper, 41, curled up on the floor of 808 Bar & Kitchen, Sunderland, Tyne & Wear, "spooning Henry the Hoover with the cheesecake by his side". Video footage from an officer's body camera shows the thief looking bewildered and shouting "Whoa, whoa, whoa" to the police, who tell him to "Wake up". When Cooper asked what was happening, he was told: "You broke into a bar, man." *Independent*, 29 Oct 2020.

### SUPER TROOPER

Nevada Highway Patrol state trooper Britta Foesch was returning from a Halloween party in a *Star Wars* Stormtrooper costume when she spotted a vehicle trying to enter Interstate I-15 in the wrong direction. A Highway Patrol spokesperson said the suspect was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence, driving without a valid driver's license, and two traffic violations, and added: "Trooper Foesch no doubt intervened and stopped a potentially deadly situation. The FORCE is strong in Trooper Foesch." *yahooneews.com*, 1 Nov 2020.

### WINSTON SMITH REDUX

A New York City man waiting for a bus in the Bronx fell into a sink-hole full of rats when the sidewalk concrete cracked open. Leonard Shoulders, 33, broke an arm and a leg when he plummeted into the rodent-filled cavity. His brother told journalists: "He couldn't move, and the rats were crawling all over him. He didn't scream, because he didn't want the rats going into his mouth." Firefighters extricated him after half an hour. *Guardian*, 29 Oct 2020.



## SIDELINES...

### FRIGHT NIGHT

A Maryland driver thought they had spotted a Hallowe'en decoration lying in the corner of a Baltimore parking lot beneath overgrown trees and shrubs. However, it turned out to be a corpse, and due to an "undetermined type of trauma to the body", homicide detectives are now appealing for witnesses who may have seen or heard something unusual. *Miami Herald*, 7 Oct 2020.

### FAKE COP SNIFFER

A man used fake police ID to convince a woman to hand over her shoes so he could sniff them, an Australian court has heard. The 33-year-old's mobile phone was also found to have several photos of women's feet stored on it. (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph*, 25 Mar 2020.

### HOUSE OF WAX

An Indian businessman commissioned a life-size wax figure of his wife, killed in a car crash three years ago. Srinivas Gupta, 57, also had a new home built in India with his wife in mind, and at the housewarming party, the wax effigy was guest of honour, dressed in a pink saree and gold accessories and positioned on the living room couch. *New York Post*, 13 Aug 2020.

### A HIGH WIND IN VIENNA

Austrian police fined a man €500 for farting loudly at them in a Vienna park. Defending the decision, a police spokesperson explained: "The person was provocative and uncooperative. He intentionally released a massive bowel wind in the immediate vicinity of the officers with full intent. That went too far." Court documents show the fine was levied for "decency violation and noise excitement". *D.Star*, 19 June 2020.



MARTIN ROSS

## PIERCED OFF

French teacher scares schoolchildren, while German man sets body modification record



PAUL ZINKEN/DPA / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Record-brokeing Rolf Bucholz – a faceful of metal. BELOW: Sylvain Helaine – don't frighten the children!

### HEAVILY MODIFIED

A German man has set a Guinness World Record for the most body modifications. Rolf Buchholz said his enthusiasm began when he got his first tattoo aged 40, and now has 516 body modifications, including tattoos, piercings and subdermal implants. He had previously set the world record for the most piercings, when they were officially counted at 453 – including 158 around his lips alone. He says he is considering further modifications. *[UPI]* 23 Oct 2020.

### A NIGHTMARE IN INK

A schoolteacher whose body, face and tongue are covered in tattoos and who has had the whites of his eyes surgically turned black has been banned from teaching young children. Sylvain Helaine, 35, is still permitted to teach children aged six and upwards at Docteur Morere Elementary School in Palaiseau, near Paris, but after the parents of a three-year-old child complained to educational authorities, he was removed from the kindergarten class. The parents said their son had experienced nightmares after seeing him. *[R]* 28 Sept 2020.



CHRISTOPHE ARCHAMBAULT / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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PAUL DEVEREUX digs up the latest discoveries: a giant feline, Ice Age footprints and Denisovan DNA



ABOVE: The newly discovered 'Nazca Cat', a feline geoglyph created 2,000 years ago in the Peruvian desert.  
BELOW RIGHT: Australian researchers go 'fishing' for Denisovan DNA in Tibet's Baishiya Karst Cave

## PUSSYCAT, PUSSYCAT WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

Not to London to see the Queen, but rather lurking almost invisibly for about 2,000 years on the arid desert pampas of Peru, home of the so-called 'Nazca Lines': a cat-like geoglyph some 37m (120ft) long etched into the side of a small hill, possibly dating to early in the Paracas culture. The creature's body is shown in profile but its head is full-face – a twist of perspective. Some people think it isn't the depiction of a cat at all, but perhaps a mythical creature or other type of feline.

Why did it almost disappear? Because all the ground drawings on the Pampa, like the later lines, were created by removal of the dun topsoil to reveal a lighter coloured subsoil which darkens over time due to oxidation, so that they tend to visually merge back into the desert surface. This renders them generally hard to see at ground level, and they show up best from the air. Exceptionally well-drawn unicursal geoglyphs depicting, amongst numerous others, a giant spider, monkey and humming bird, have long been known about and photographed, but in recent years aerial survey has been greatly enhanced by the use of drones so that currently well over 100 previously unknown ground drawings have been spotted – this cat-like geoglyph being one of them. As we can see in the photograph here, it now stands out clearly, but that is only because a team of archaeologists has freshened its lines, which vary between 12 and 15 inches (30-40cm) wide. *Guardian*, 18 Oct; *phys.org* 20 Oct, 2020.

## A PERILOUS JOURNEY

An exceptional discovery of late Ice Age (Pleistocene era) human footprints tracking

for 1.5km (almost a mile) have been made at White Sands National Park in New Mexico. Normally, tracks would not be preserved in the gypsum sands there, but in this case the extremely clear fossilised footprints must have been made during a long-ago muddy period. The more than 420 prints are those of an adolescent or young female, and intermittently among them those of a toddler.

Using visual and computer-modelled analysis of the depth variations, outlines and other properties of the footprints has enabled the Anglo-American researchers to determine that they mark an out-and-back journey conducted at a rapid walking pace. The young adult seems to have periodically carried the child on the left hip, every 100yds (90m) or so, putting the toddler down briefly on the ground.

Why the haste? Doubtless because potentially dangerous large mammals were roaming across the same tract of land. The prints of a mammoth and a giant sloth show on top of those of the humans on the northbound path, but below on the southbound, indicating that the humans had fitted their relatively speedy sortie of a few hours into a gap in the animals' crossings. Never mind the mammoth, a giant sloth could weigh as much as 4 tons and grow to a length of 6m (20ft), so it is highly understandable that our scurrying humans wouldn't want to encounter one. *NY Times*, 23 Oct, 2020. Original paper: *Quaternary Science Reviews*: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quascirev.2020.106610>.

## IN A TIBETAN CAVE

When modern humans left Africa, they encountered various strains of now extinct archaic humans, among them the mysterious Denisovans, Asian cousins of

the better-known Neanderthals. All that has been found of these shadowy hominins are bone fragments in a Siberian cave and more recently a jawbone in the Baishiya Karst Cave located at 3,280m (10,800ft) on a high plateau in Tibet. This latter fossil fragment has been controversial, though, with various experts questioning its Denisovan provenance. So a team of Australian researchers have revisited the Tibetan cave, which is now a Buddhist sanctuary, to see what more can be found. They were allowed in to conduct their research for only a few winter days, and at night, moreover, when the temperature drops to minus 18 degrees. The researchers had to dig into the frozen floor of the cave, where they unearthed hundreds of animal bone fragments and a few basic stone tools, though no further human fossils. But a paper in *Science* reports that they had a novel technique at their disposal – jokingly described as "DNA fishing".

We shed DNA all over the place, in bodily fluids, skin flakes, faeces and so forth. In frozen ground, some DNA can survive for many thousands of years. Using this delicate new technique, the Australian researchers managed to extract Denisovan mitochondrial DNA from four sediment layers in the cave, dating between 100,000 and possibly 45,000 years ago. Denisovans obviously occupied the cave over long periods, but the findings also extended "the time of occupation of the Tibetan plateau by hominins", according to the paper's abstract. Furthermore, the suspect jawbone looks now to have pretty secure Denisovan provenance.

We know that the out-of-Africa modern humans were seemingly as randy as hell, having sex with just about all the archaic humans they encountered. Neanderthal DNA has infused itself into our genome, for example, and remnant elements of Denisovan DNA are found in Aboriginal and Tibetan populations. It seems that the Denisovans had a gene that enabled them to live at high altitudes, a characteristic found with some Tibetans. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 Nov, 2020. Original paper: *Science*, 30 Oct, 2020: vol.370, issue 6516.





# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 253: RUNCIMAN-IA

Ignore the snuffy academics. Longæval (1903-2000) Steven Runciman (from Rouncieman = dealer in packhorses) was the 20th-century's supreme Byzantinist, above all for his famous trilogy on the Crusades, summed up by him Trump-style as BAD!

Now (2016), Minoo Dinshaw's opulent (768 pages) *Outlandish Knight: The Byzantine Life of Steven Runciman* provides meticulous documentary detail and personal attestations that afford much grist to the FT mill.

An early anecdote has him and sister Margie playing at divorce (field-day for psychologists?) with their toy monkeys, later burying these, when decomposed, with full ritual.

A close boyhood friend was 'Puffin' Asquith, son of the famous Margot, the first woman to smoke publicly in England, later provoking a Romanian riot by lighting a cigar in a cinema, also provocatively attending a school occasion in Harem Pants. Steven and 'Puffin' were independently elected third best scholars for Eton and Westminster. He detested all dairy products, whereas best Eton chum George Orwell secretly manufactured cheese in his room – How?

Steven and George jointly broke the leg off a voodoo doll to punish a school bully – latter promptly broke his leg in an Eton Field Game and soon died of leukæmia. This was not his last such accurate death prediction, one dooming his grandfather, another the successor to his Cambridge rooms, branded as a "philistine mathematician". Runciman had a life-long fascination with the occult, being (e.g.) convinced a particular chair and a woman's ring were haunted and believed the female acquaintance who claimed she had regular trysts with Shelley's shade.

Much later, he would acquire the nail-clippings of notorious Oxford classicist Maurice Bowra in order to bewitch him. Runciman was also fascinated by the ancient annual virginity-restoring Canapus spring (Pausanias, bk2 ch38, para2), disappointedly remarking: "I have never been able to persuade any of my lady friends to see if the magic still works."

They were taught French by Aldous Huxley, whom Orwell defended against class-ragging: "A neat image: the prophet of *Brave New World* shielded by the creator of 1984 – perhaps a little too neat" – Dinshaw.

Classics were handled by ASF Gow, absurdly claimed by Brian Sewell (*Outsider II: Always Almost: Never Quite*, 2012) to have been the Cambridge Spies' 'Fifth Man'. Talking of whom, Runciman was dislikingly acquainted with Blunt, and his star pupil was Guy Burgess.

Another Eton master, Andrew Robinson, encapsulated his life thus: "He played piano duets with the last emperor of China, told Tarot cards for King Fuad of Egypt, narrowly missed being blown up by the Germans in Istanbul, and twice hit the jackpot on slot machines in Las Vegas."

As a Cambridge undergraduate, Steven in full *Brideshead* mode drew attention with his lipstick and rouge (when I met him late in life, he still wore full-slap – one thinks of Quentin Crisp), dresses, and pet parakeet Benedict, albeit Byron had long ago outshone him with pet bear Bruin – the dons found no anti-ursine regulation.

All on show in cover-picture by Cecil Beaton, the ash from whose tossed-away cigarette ignited the straw hat of a lady passing below. This is outdone, though, by his (with Princess Alice and classicist Stewart Perowne) dropping hot wax onto the bald spot of the later Field-Marshal Montgomery.

Various Byzantine exotica intervene. We have Krum the Bulgar with his goblet made from an emperor's skull, Constans II assassinated with a silver bucket or soap-dish in his bath, and Irene who usurped her son's throne by blinding him – Runciman mischievously claims her as a prototypical feminist.

His many lady friends ranged from Queen Marie of Romania, whose extraordinary boudoir featured a bed made from a Byzantine iconostasis ("perhaps a wee bit blasphemous"), to Lady Petersen who served guests dog biscuits with the cheeseboard. A distinctive non-human acquaintance was Giro, the terrier dog of Nazi Leopold von Hoesch, electrocuted – How? – in 1934, whose statue is said to be the only surviving one in London of any Hitler diplomat. Hoesch also features in a gallery of homo- and bi-sexual Nazi luminaries, being the most notable for his affair with Wallis Simpson.

Sex features prominently, from millionaire Neil McEacharn, "whose sex life had made unwise his continued residence in the Lowlands," to Honor Philipps's two husbands, the first well-known for addressing House of Lords

gatherings as "My Dears" and a four-week marriage, begun by a honeymoon "attended by a sailor" – what exactly were his duties? Her second spouse was the Chairman of Sotheby's, "whose sexual preferences were ambivalent, but he was more tactful about them."

Runciman himself was flamboyantly and unabashedly homosexual. Dinshaw devotes one specific chapter to this side of things. Names and episodes abound, but carnal details are rightly passed over in discreet silence. Indeed, the book's one lubricious moment concerns Blunt and Burgess: they would not have been lovers, since both liked only the passive position.

Runciman spent a good deal of his life on the Hebridean island of Eigg and the family's Northumberland family pile, Doxford Hall. The former had seen two bloody massacres. In 617, St Donna and followers were burnt alive on the beach by the local Pictish queen as sacrifice to her pagan deities. In 1577, a raiding party of MacLeods, their minds on the local girls, after being driven out by the MacDonalds, returned and burnt 395 of them in a cave (still pointed out), the island's entire population, minus one old crone.

Runciman disrelished Doxford Hall, as James Bond did Skyfall, one reason perhaps being the 1900 episode in which the incumbents were forced out when their neighbours from Ellingham Hall poisoned their drinking water by dumping a dead horse in the well – cue Adele for a follow-up ditty.

One point may have to be conceded to Runciman's academic detractors. He is frequently accused of being fanciful to the point of fabrication. There appears to be no evidence for his claim that King Zog of Albania died in a brothel and was subsequently represented in public by an imposter double.

An engineer helping Constantinople's defence in the fateful siege of 1453 was a certain Johannes Grandi, dubbed German by contemporary Greek and Latin sources. Runciman, however, convinced himself, if no one else, that he was actually a Scot called John Grant. By now, our historian was a fierce Caledonian champion, perhaps determined that this famous event (to which he devoted an entire book) did not get off Scot-free...

"It may be that the general style of architecture upon the moon is Byzantine..." – Fort, *Books*, p432



# All done with mirrors

DAVID HAMBLING reveals that Kim Kardashian West's 'hologram' was actually a far older illusion

Kim Kardashian West recently raved on social media about a 40<sup>th</sup> birthday present from her husband Kanye West. "Kanye got me the most thoughtful gift of a lifetime. A special surprise from heaven. A hologram of my dad. It is so lifelike and we watched it over and over, filled with lots so [sic] tears and emotion," she wrote. Twitter was soon awash with mocking responses, featuring holograms and ghost appearances from *Star Wars*, *The Lion King* and *Ghostbusters*. However, things were not quite as they seemed. The impressive birthday present was not actually a hologram as Kim believed. Instead, it was the latest version of a Victorian illusion that stunned audiences over a century and a half ago, known as Pepper's Ghost.

'Professor' John Henry Pepper first revealed the effect at the Polytechnic Institution in London in 1862. Pepper was not a real professor, but wrote science education books, experimented with electricity, and contributed to the theory of continental drift. He spent some time in Australia, where he tried unsuccessfully to alleviate a drought by creating rain with guns, rockets, and a kite with a charge of gunpowder. He is best remembered as a science presenter, who showed how mediums faked their effects – and as the inventor of Pepper's Ghost.

Pepper was renowned for his contribution to the Polytechnic's Christmas entertainment when he came across Dirck's Phantasmagoria. Phantasmagorias were popular entertainments using magic lanterns – early still image projectors – to project ghosts, skeletons or devils on to surfaces, including smoke and semi-transparent screens. Originally presented as genuine séances, phantasmagoria became the period equivalent of the horror movie, shocking audiences with amazing but obviously fabricated spooks.

Dirck's Phantasmagoria took things up a notch; rather than static two-dimensional images, it projected a phantom of a living, moving three-dimensional actor. Dirck showed it to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1858 in model form, but there was no commercial interest because accommodating the effect would require rebuilding theatres. Pepper modified the effect so it could be shown at any theatre with a pit under the stage.

The heart of the illusion is a sheet of angled glass between the audience and the



LEFT: An 1862 illustration showing the set-up of the Pepper's Ghost illusion.

scene they are viewing. A well-illuminated actor below the audience's line of sight in the pit is reflected in the glass, and appears to be standing on or hovering over the stage, apparently interacting with actors. The illusion works if the lighting is kept low and indirect so the glass itself is invisible.

Pepper unveiled the effect in a presentation called 'A Strange Lecture' to an invited audience on Christmas Eve 1862. In a segment called 'The Spectre Drama', Pepper walked through the apparently solid image of another person. He originally intended to finish the demonstration by explaining how it was done, but the overwhelming reaction of the audience to the appearance of the ghost changed his mind. Reviewers agreed that the effect was the "most startling novelty of the season." It transferred to the Polytechnic's larger lecture theatre and played all through 1863, seen by celebrities including the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII). The Polytechnic became the Royal Polytechnic and made unheard-of profits from the performances. Theatres adopted the effect whenever an impressive ghost was needed. While Pepper always credited Dirck, the name Dirck's Phantasmagoria was soon replaced with Pepper's Ghost.

The effect spread to other arms of showbusiness. A version of it was behind the 'Ape Girl' illusion, a staple of touring fairs. The audience looked into a cage apparently containing a woman, allegedly captured in a jungle or with some equally hokey back-story. What the audience actually saw was the woman's reflection; as the lights went down, she gradually faded out to be replaced by an actor in a gorilla

suit – the real occupant of the cage. The show ended with the 'gorilla' breaking out of the cage and chasing the audience.

Pepper's ghost has always been a novelty act, better at portraying semi-translucent phantoms than more solid beings. Some of the most successful uses have been in theme parks, like Walt Disney's Haunted Mansion and Phantom Manor attractions. The ghost of Robert Kardashian was created by Kaleida, which calls itself "a leading hologram company creating holographic experiences for clients around the world." Their products

are used in musical performances, stage shows and public attractions. They often bring the dead back to life – Pepper's ghosts now include Amy Winehouse, Tupac Shakur and Freddie Mercury. They can also insert a spectral or 'holographic' version of a famous actor into a stage show that could not otherwise afford them. Where an actor is not available, as in Kardashian's case, motion capture and technology like that used for Deepfakes can bring them back to deliver any script required, such as telling Kim Kardashian West what a wonderful daughter she is on her birthday. One of Kaleida's secrets is a fine gauze known as Holonet, "the brightest, most transparent hologram gauze available today." This creates screens that, in suitable lighting, are invisible to the audience and are easier to work with than large glass sheets. In the case of the Kardashians, as in Victorian times, surprise and showmanship played their part. The family were told only that there was a special present, and taken into a darkened room where the effect had been set up; they did not know what they were going to see. A video of the speech given by the Robert Kardashian 'hologram' is on Kaleida's website.

Novelty wears off. While Pepper brought his ghost back several times, audiences got bored of it after a few months. The illusion still works today because it is relatively rare. Gazing at a television screen, a much more advanced technology, no longer inspires wonder. However, it is still remarkable that an illusion that has now been around for more than 150 years still has the capacity to wow an audience – even if it has to be presented as a high-tech hologram.



# RUM JAMAICAN TALES

Snake venom foils spell, woman fights magical curse, and the man with a spirit lizard down his pants...



ABOVE: Singer and actress Safira Mono drank snake venom to cure herself. BELOW RIGHT: A Jamaican green lizard, also known as the giant anole (*Anolis garmani*).

## SNAKE HEAD DELIVERANCE

A Jamaican dancehall artist and actress has overcome an alleged spell placed on her by a rival performer by wearing the head of a snake around her neck for spiritual protection. Safira Mono insists the reptile was instrumental in her deliverance after she became sick.

"Yow! Is a artiste weh mi look up to, enuh, but after the female come near mi, mi head just raise big suh, and is like mi go inna one different space." ["She was an artiste I looked up to, but after she came near me, my head became swollen and I felt like I went into another realm."] "Mi go on the stage, and mi couldn't sing. It was like mi tongue get heavy," she told reporters.

She said she became gravely ill, suffering from weight loss, dizziness and fever, and that doctors were unable to cure her. "Mi body feel hot, like it deh pon fire, and mi dizzy like crazy," she recalled. "Fat, fat me get down mawga, mawga." ["I went from fat to thin."] "Mi faint and wake up inna hospital," Safira continued, "and at a point in time, the doctor dem a wonder

if a lupus mi have, but the blood work never show that."

But after Safira met her ancestors in a vision, they told her to drink snake venom. "Mi grow up in church and around positive people, so mi never believe in certain things, but my ancestors, in a dream, had to grab me up and teach mi some things and let mi know seh mi have to go find a rattlesnake to protect me," she explained.

She then journeyed into the Californian desert to find rattlesnakes. Rolling up a sleeve, she showed the journalist a mark and swelling on her left arm, caused, she said, by a rattlesnake bite.

Experts say that it can be dangerous if one is bitten by a rattlesnake but that the snake's bite is very rarely fatal. "Anyone who follows me knows that I am always focused on wildlife because I am a Maroon, which means that I am very strong on my African heritage," Safira said. "I had to go on a spiritual journey before I went in the desert. The head that I have round mi neck belongs to the 13th one that I catch. I had to drink its venom

inna mi juice with rum in order to save my life because the doctors couldn't cure me because they didn't know what was wrong with me."

Now healthy again, and back in the studio recording more tunes, she is exploring the topic of witchcraft in her latest single, titled 'Tun Back Blow'. [jamaica-star.com](http://jamaica-star.com), 6 Mar 2020.

## DISFIGURED BY OBEAH

A Jamaican woman living in the USA is convinced she is the victim of an obeah curse set on her by an Hispanic woman jealous of her relationship with the woman's estranged husband. 'Mary Brown', 35, says she has lost weight, her appearance has changed and she is unable to get a job: "Right now mi mawga [thin] and no matter how mi deh eat, mi can't put on nuh weight. Mi get dark and ugly and mi look different," she explained. "I have struggled to keep a job among other things. A part of me is sorry I met him, because I am a good person who don't deserve this."

Her problems began some months ago, she believes, when she met the man in question, who was in the process of divorcing his Hispanic wife. At first, their relationship was going well, but at the start of this year things started to go wrong. "One day we go in his car and in there was stink and smell like rotten flesh. We searched everywhere in it and couldn't find anything... but it only leave the car and transferred to him." She also described experiencing "awful dreams" and seeing a tall figure standing in her room, which later disappeared as she stared at it. She has seen several Spiritualists in efforts to free herself from the supposed curse, but they have all apparently told her that the spell is too powerful. When she sent a photo of the Hispanic woman to one of the Spiritualists during a Skype call, she heard them scream before the line went silent for a couple of minutes. Afterwards, the Spiritualist told her that the woman's soul was black. Others have told her

they are unable to assist, since her assailant is a Satanist and they are not powerful enough to combat the Devil. *Jamaica Weekly Gleaner*, 2 Sep 2020.

## DUPPY LIZARD

Road-building work for a new Jamaican motorway was held up after a construction worker's colleagues rescued him from a green lizard that had climbed inside his clothing. "Nobody nuh go ova deh suh," one man was reported as saying. "One big ol' green lizard deh pan di man pants a go up."

Perhaps significantly, the unfortunate construction worker, an employee of the China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC), was in the process of cordoning off a graveyard located on the new highway's route some days earlier. Local residents complained that several graves had been disturbed, with some suggesting that a duppy (spirit) of one of the deceased had returned in the form of the lizard to register its disapproval. "The lizard know a nuh the residents dem trouble dem place [the lizard knows it wasn't the residents who disturbed the place]," said another.

After a thorough search of the worker's clothes, the green lizard was located and killed. A CHEC spokesperson said no further work would be done on that particular stretch of the highway before a consultation with locals. *Jamaica Weekly Gleaner*, 19 Aug 2020.



CHARLES J SHARP / CREATIVE COMMONS



## Vile piggishness

ALAN MURDIE sniffs out some rare stories of porcine possession and supernatural swine



JOERN POLLEX / GETTY IMAGES

One Christmas morning back in the 1960s, or maybe earlier, a man from the village of Cawthorpe in Lincolnshire set out on foot for the pub in neighbouring Legbourne, intending to join “his cronies” for a festive drink. Walking by a gate to a particular plantation, he heard footsteps behind him. Fancying a chat with a fellow wayfarer heading in the same direction towards the pub, he slowed his pace to allow the other walker to catch up with him. He heard the footsteps drawing closer, then exactly parallel with him and then overtaking him. But no one was visible!

Scarcely had he absorbed this startling fact when a herd of pigs came dashing down the road towards him. Greatly startled and alarmed by their abrupt appearance, he was forced to leap aside on to the verge to avoid them careering into him. Regaining his balance sufficiently to look around, he could see no pigs. The herd had vanished as unexpectedly as it had appeared. He was completely alone on the empty road as before.

It should be emphasised that he witnessed this spectacle *before* reaching the pub. On arriving, he blurted out his

### When pigs feature in ghost stories there is usually an association with evil spirits

story, half-expecting to be met with ridicule and disbelief – for this Christmas walker had witnessed an entire herd of one of the rarest forms of apparition – the ghostly pig.

Humans have an unusual relationship with pigs. Winston Churchill: “Dogs look up to you, cats look down on you. Give me a pig! He looks you in the eye and treats you as an equal.”

First domesticated in the Neolithic era, pigs have coexisted with humankind for millennia. The pig is a beast upon which humanity projects its fears, hopes, anxieties, prejudices and disgust. Pigs are associated with filth and disease, yet most societies worldwide steadily consume increasing amounts of its flesh each year.

The pig is loved as a popular cartoon

figure for children, but it is also one that will occasionally kill and eat them. Tragic stories of swine attacks on infants occurred in Cameroon in 2020 and in China in 2014. Such cases were still within living memory of elderly country people alive in the 1970s, recalling days before 1914 when many labourers in rural England kept a pig and subsisted upon a basic diet of bread, beer and bacon (see the *East Anglian Handbook*, 1970, edited by Michael Watkins). Yet despite many superstitions being associated with them, pigs rarely feature in ghost stories; when they do, there is usually an association with evil spirits, human crime and social sins.

The most famous story of pigs and the supernatural is found in the New Testament, the miraculous removal by Jesus of multiple demons from a possessed man living among tombs at Gerasene and their transferral into a herd of pigs, known ever since as the Gadarene swine. The earliest account comes from St Mark 5:1-20. The demons give their name as “Legion, for we are many”. The possessed man underwent an instant cure when the demons were expelled from

him and entered into a nearby herd of several thousand foraging pigs, which then dementedly charge into a lake and drown. Like all New Testament miracles, the story has received exhaustive study, with one of the most penetrating being that by Dr Leslie Weatherhead (1893-1976) a leading 20th century Methodist scholar, who examined its wider context from the perspective of modern psychological theories.

Gadara was a Greek colony in biblical times, explaining the presence of the pigs, with Jews supplying the Greeks and profiting from a creature regarded as unclean. Weatherhead postulated the demon-possessed man might have been wracked with social guilt to the point of mental breakdown. Alternatively, Weatherhead postulated that the insanity of the man stemmed from torture inflicted by Roman soldiers, explaining the reference to the demons as 'Legion'.

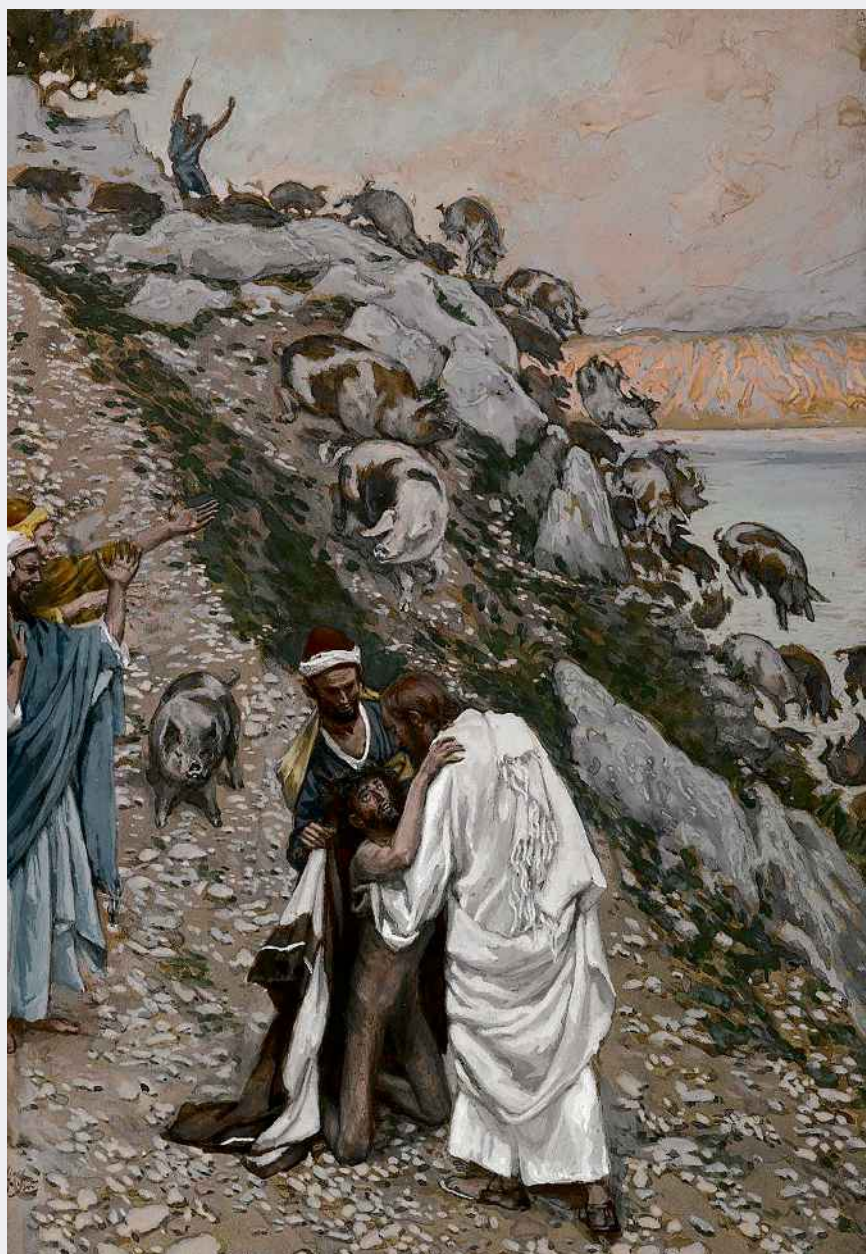
Visiting the Holy Land, Weatherhead pinpointed the miracle occurring at Khersa on the eastern (Golan Heights) side of the Sea of Galilee, the only spot on the entire shore where the steep ground falls into deep water. Recalling this visit in *Religion, Psychology and Healing* (1963) Weatherhead wrote:

"On a blazing June morning in 1934 I found this place strangely uncanny, weirdly desolate" adding: "If it made that impression on a Western mind on a sunny June morning, after a peaceful voyage in a motor-boat, we can imagine the effect produced on the minds of the superstitious disciples who thought pigs were unclean and graveyards full of devils, in the dusk of the late evening" – but he heard no ghostly squeals or grunts.

While recognising parallels between spiritual healing in miracle stories and techniques of psychotherapy, and citing how pigs easily panic, he found no parallel case in psychiatric literature where an instantaneous cure coincided with a reaction in animals; but an exorcism manual published in 1972 directed that whenever rituals take place, no animals should be on the premises.

Elements of crime, sin, burial sites and a sense of evil can be found in stories of swinish hauntings many centuries later. Ghost hunter Elliot O'Donnell recounts in *Animal Ghosts* (1913) a haunting by phantom pigs, citing an eyewitness 'a Mr B', a small boy at the time. He lived with his family in a small house called the Moat Grange in the Chilterns, situated in a very lonely spot near crossroads connecting four towns. A gibbet once stood there, with the bodies of executed criminals buried in the moat.

Soon after moving in, the family were awakened by the most dreadful noises, part human and part animal. Getting up



ABOVE: The Gospel story of the Gadarene swine, in which expelled demons enter a herd of pigs.

and looking through a long front window overlooking the crossroads, they saw a number of spotted creatures like pigs, screaming, fighting and tearing up the soil, inflamed by heaven knows what impulses. They appeared above the criminals' cemetery. As Mr B was about to strike a light on the tinderbox, a "most diabolical white face" pressed itself against the windowpane outside, staring in towards them. The children shrieked with terror and Mrs B fell to her knees and prayed, whereupon the face at the window vanished. The herd of pigs, ceasing their rampage, tore frantically down one of the highroads, disappearing from view. Thereafter, the haunting intensified,

becoming so bad the family moved out.

Assuming there is any truth in this tale, from its vague details it occurred during the 19th century, between the end of gibbeting in 1834 and before the arrival of domestic electricity. The precise location remains obscure. The only information available that might identify the locality as somewhere other than within O'Donnell's imagination is that the family name was Bonsell, revealed when the story was republished in the posthumous Elliot O'Donnell's *Ghost Hunters* (1971) edited by Harry Ludlam. O'Donnell speculated that either "the pig-like ghosts were supposed to be the earth-bound spirits of the executed criminals" or alternatively, "the herd of hogs may well



# GHOSTWATCH



**ABOVE:** The phenomena at the Amityville house, seen here in film (left) and reality (right), included a phantom pig with glowing red eyes. **FACING PAGE:** The terrifying Glosen of Swedish folklore, drawn by artist Sophy Fredriksson, whose illustrations can be purchased at [www.etsy.com/nz/shop/CustomBySophy](http://www.etsy.com/nz/shop/CustomBySophy).

have been the phantasms of actual earth-bound pigs – attracted to the spot by a sort of fellow-feeling for the criminals, whose gross and carnal natures would no doubt appeal to them.”

With its elements of old burial ground, violent crime, a haunted house and a terrified family fleeing alarming manifestations featuring pigs, one is irresistibly reminded of America's most notorious haunted house, 112 Ocean Avenue, Long Island, scene of the alleged ‘Amityville Horror’ [see **FT190:32-37, 325:44-46, 397:56-57**].

For anyone unfamiliar with this grand guignol of the 1970s, it was the story of George and Kathleen Lutz and their three children who were driven out of this house of horrors in January 1976 after just 28 days in residence. According to the best-selling *The Amityville Horror* (1977) by Jay Anson, in their brief occupation the Lutz family suffered ghostly voices, symptoms of possession, swarms of flies, slime oozing from walls and a variety of physical incidents and demonic apparitions. A highlight was a phantom pig with glowing red eyes staring in at the window and leaving giant tracks in the snow.

George and Kathleen Lutz had originally purchased the property at a knockdown price arising from it being the site of the massacre of six members of the DeFeo family by 23-year-old Ronnie DeFeo Jr on 13 November 1974. Anson also asserted the house stood on an old native American burial ground. The book proved a runaway

success, blending classic elements from gothic literature with the 1970s fashion for novels and films about devils and possession. It has inspired numerous films, notwithstanding prompt investigations casting doubt upon many aspects, owing to the subjective and uncorroborated nature of most experiences reported by the Lutz family and the discovery that some events either never happened or were hugely exaggerated. Examining 49 claimed incidents, British ghost hunter Philip Paul (1923-2010) proposed natural explanations for most. Visiting 112 Ocean Avenue, he spoke to the new owners, James and Barbara Cromarty, learning they had experienced no ghosts but their life in the house was made “nightmarish by the persistent attentions of numerous morbid sightseers.” The new couple told the *Washington Post* of enduring “vandals and gawkers, who stood on the lawn for hours, rang the doorbell and asked whether Ronnie DeFeo was in.”

After several months of extensive research and interviews with those involved, Dr Stephen Kaplan, Director of the Parapsychology Institute of America, stated of the property in the journal *Theta* (1977, vol.5, no.4): “It is our professional opinion that the story of its haunting is mostly fiction.”

Further complications ensued, following litigation over Anson's book and the rights to the millions of dollars it generated. Nevertheless in 2013, Danny Lutz maintained some genuine phenomena

occurred at his childhood home, and he complained of still being troubled by memories. (See Philip Paul, ‘Amityville Horror or Outrage?’ in *Some Unseen Power*, 1983; *Washington Post*, 16 Sept 1979; ‘Return to Amityville: eldest son of family terrorized by ‘possessed’ Long Island home’, *D.Mail*, 8 Mar 2013).

Claims of a phantom pig, amid a whole collection of beastly apparitions and strange phenomena, arose at the village of Hoe Benham in Buckinghamshire in the Edwardian era. Two artists, Osmund Pittman and Reginald Waud, had lived in a cottage for four years when visited in the autumn 1907 by their friend and student Miss Clarissa Miles. Miss Miles was an outdoors type keen on horses and hunting, but with a strong artistic streak. She also considered herself to possess psychic abilities, and experimented with telepathy and mediumship.

On 2 November 1907 (All Soul's Day), Mr Pittman had just collected their milk delivery at the cottage. Gazing up the road, he saw Miss Miles approaching carrying her easel and paint-box. Following behind her was a large white pig with a long snout. Surprised, he went down to the painting studio and said to Waud, “What do you think Miss Miles is bringing down with her this morning, instead of her chow? A large pig!”

They both “roared with laughter”, cracking jokes about not letting the animal into their garden. As Miss Miles arrived, Pittman opened the window and shouted

out, “What have you done with your companion?” She was baffled, saying, “My companion, what do you mean?” They told her what had been following her. Going to check, she found the road was empty. Neither had the milkman seen any stray pig. Later, they enquired in the village, No one had reported any escaped pig; it turned out swine fever restrictions were in force. But what enquiries did reveal were numerous sightings of strange creatures by villagers, spanning 50 years.

Pittman and Ward were inundated with stories of animal apparitions, variously resembling a cat, a dog, a sheep, or a rabbit, together with a creature that changed shape. For example, a William Thorne told of seeing in January 1905 an apparition like a large black dog running out from a hedge. Initially, he thought it was the dog belonging to the curate, but it suddenly changed shape, appearing as a black donkey standing on its hind legs with glowing eyes “almost as big as saucers”.

Others reported seeing a strange snowy white shape “too large for a cat, more the size of a terrier with a fluffy coat.” Sightings of this and other entities with glowing eyes stalking the area went back many years. Villagers blamed manifestations upon ‘Tommy King’, an 18th century farmer who had committed suicide.

In February 1908 Clarissa Miles returned to Hoe Benham to continue her painting and investigate the manifestations further. Passing a spot known as Tommy King’s Well, she sensed an evil spirit trailing them, “a deadly malice and hate in the air”. On another night, she and the two artists all heard an unearthly scream that ended in a moan. Venturing back to the Well under bright moonlight, Miss Miles attempted contacting the entity by automatic writing, her hand writing the words: “I am in hell, pray for me” twice over.

Subsequently, all three witnessed other strange luminous phenomena, vague apparitions and further uncanny noises, these continuing until 27 February 1908, when Miss Miles left Hoe Benham. Unfortunately, as many of these experiences were subjective or occurred in states of heightened suggestibility and expectation, it is difficult to unravel from the diverse accounts what was produced by over-imagination, what phenomena were possibly genuine and what amounted to folkloric motifs of the dead returning in animal form. (*SPR Journal*, vol.13, 1907-08, p.253; *Ghosts Over Britain*, 1976, by Peter Moss).

Folkloric fragments lacking origin stories telling of phantom pigs are known from Wiltshire, Hertfordshire, the Isle of Man and a few other places. At Kelling and Salthouse on the Norfolk coast, a phantom blue sow crossed the road with no hedge growing there, but locals had no story or explanation beyond considering it a ruse by smugglers (‘Some East Anglian Hauntings’ in *Here are Ghosts and Witches*, 1954, by J Wentworth Day). Otherwise, ghostly pigs are rare in the spectral bestiary of the British Isles, so the report of Christmas Day Cawthorpe swine at Cawthorpe is very much a stand-alone oddity.



The lack of other corroborating witnesses is not surprising, given the period. Until the end of the 1970s, British roads were typically devoid of traffic on 25 December, until higher car ownership and greater rates of family breakdown ensured they became packed with divorced parents driving from one unwanted turkey to another.

Yet it appears the witness was not mocked upon relating his ghost experience at the pub, but found a sympathetic audience. A listener recalled that at the plantation entrance where the walker first heard the footsteps there once stood a memorial stone, commemorating the murder of a drover around the year 1800. The drover was returning with a herd of pigs purchased at Louth Market and a pocket full of coins from the sale of his own stock when he was ambushed and his throat

cut by a robber. Apparently, some soldiers removed this monument during World War II.

More problematic is that the whole story of the phantom pigs of Cawthorpe turns out to be second-hand, collected by Joan Forman for a book on hauntings (see ‘Walking Boots and Pigs’ in *Haunted East Anglia*, 1974). Her informant was not the witness himself but a Mr Harry Borrill of Cawthorpe, “80 if he was but a day”. He said it happened “a few years ago” a span in oral accounts capable of expansion like a pocket telescope. However, the reference to World War II and the monument potentially narrows it down to a Christmas Day sometime between 1945 and 1971, when Joan Forman began collecting her material.

I feel several factors should encourage further investigation into the Christmas pig ghosts at Cawthorpe. Firstly, Joan Forman, trained as a journalist, was a thoughtful and thorough researcher. Moreover, she grew up in Cawthorpe and revealed in a rather understated and non-sensational way that the area constitutes something of a paranormal hotspot.

Then there is also an intriguing report from “Alexa and Jonathan” received by BBC Lincolnshire on 24 September 2014, declaring: “On our way home last night (around 10:45pm) from Legborne to Louth, my partner and I were driving down the Legborne road when I spotted a pair of feet moving across the road. My partner slowed... I asked him if he had seen ‘that’. He hadn’t... but had seen the head and shoulders of a person running across the road. We were both as cold as ice”. Only the next day did Alexa

learn of hauntings on the road attributed to a suicide and of “a pig farmer who walks the road”.

Finally, one may note the traditional belief in ghosts manifesting at Christmas, held in Britain and Scandinavia. In Swedish folklore, walking out at Christmas might induce spectral encounters, some carrying a prophetic meaning. One particularly feared seasonal spectre is called ‘the Glosön’, which takes the form of a terrible ghost pig. Appearing near churchyards and on roads over Christmastime, it is considered dangerous to encounter. (See [www.bbc.co.uk/lincolnshire/unexplained/your\\_sightings.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/lincolnshire/unexplained/your_sightings.shtml); ‘He Met His Own Funeral Procession: The Year Walk Ritual in Swedish Folk Tradition’ in *Folk Belief and Traditions of the Supernatural* (2016) edited by Tommy Kuusela & Giuseppe Maiello.



## MEDICAL BAG

This month's surgery of the strange includes a bone-hoarding surgeon, a sleep-shopper and a New Jersey hypnotist with wandering fingers



ABOVE LEFT: Kelly Snipes spent thousands of pounds on online purchases, but had no memory of her nocturnal shopping sprees. ABOVE RIGHT: 'Master hypnotist' Robert Bruckner – accused of poking his fingers where they were not wanted.

### MYSTERY SHOPPER

Kelly Snipes of Basildon, Essex, would frequently wake up to find emailed receipts for items she had bought online the previous night, purchases for which she had no recollection. Her nocturnal shopping sprees began seven years before, with the onset of sleep apnoea after the birth of her first son Henry. Sleep apnoea causes people to suffer breathing difficulties while asleep and can be responsible for a number of symptoms. Mrs Snipes, 38, had been a sleepwalker as a child and would wake to find doors and windows opened during the night, but the apnoea exacerbated the problem.

She spent £3,000 on various items, including a full-sized basketball court bought on eBay, £58 worth of cookie jars, and hundreds of pounds worth of Haribo sweets. She had also bought items of young girls' clothing, despite only having sons. Her credit card details were stored on her phone, which could be accessed by touch.

Trying to solve the problem,

Mrs Snipes asked her husband to stay awake at night to watch her sleep, but he kept falling asleep himself. Eventually she saw a specialist who diagnosed the problem, and prescribed a CPAP machine which she uses at night to increase her oxygen levels. So far, it has been successful in preventing further unconscious shopping sprees. *echo-news.co.uk; Metro, 2 Oct 2020.*

### HYPNOTIST FINGERED

New Jersey "master hypnotist" Robert Bruckner was arrested for allegedly subjecting his patients to illegal prostate exams. Bruckner runs Major Mindset Hypnosis-Counseling, based in Fairfield, New Jersey, and offers his hypnotherapy services to adults, teenagers and children. He is not a licensed doctor. According to his website, he focuses on "academic, sports performance and medical hypnosis-counseling", with programmes to help people lose weight, stop smoking, and alleviate stress or tension. His profile on PsychologyToday.com says he

has been practising for eight years, listing ADHD, anxiety and children/adolescents as specialist areas, as well as a range of issues including chronic pain, "men's issues" and self-esteem. Sessions cost between \$295-\$395 (£225-£300). "I can make problems go away", his profile claims.

A joint investigation by Essex County Prosecutor's Office and Fairfield police was launched after patients had reported Bruckner to police, describing therapy sessions during which the hypnotist had told them it was necessary to perform prostate examinations. It is unclear as yet whether the patients were under hypnosis during the assaults. Bruckner was arrested and charged with sexual assault, endangering the welfare of a child, and practising medicine without a license. *wsbtv.com; nypost.com, 2 Oct 2020.*

### ANIMAL CRACKERS

Researchers from the Flemish university KU Leuven have identified what they describe as a potentially under-reported

mental illness, zoanthropy, whereby people believe themselves to be animals. A recent Belgian case of a 54-year-old woman who thought she was a chicken has highlighted the syndrome. The woman, who has no history of drug or alcohol abuse, was seen by her brother blowing out her cheeks and clucking and crowing like a rooster in her garden. Admitted to hospital, she affirmed her belief that she was a chicken, and described feeling new sensations in her limbs. After suffering a seizure, the delusion vanished and the woman was reportedly embarrassed by the episode.

Examining historical and medical records from between 1850 and 2012, the researchers found only 56 instances of zoanthropy, with patients believing themselves to be, variously, a bee, bird, boar, cat, cow, crocodile, dog, frog, gerbil, goose, horse, hyena, lion, rabbit, rhinoceros, shark, snake or tiger. Their research paper linked the condition with established psychiatric diagnoses like schizophrenia, depression or bipolar disorder, although it is unusual for patients with these psychotic illnesses to have their symptoms alleviated. Zoanthropy symptoms may last from an hour to several decades. *Guardian, 29 July 2020.*

### BRAIN-EATING AMOEBA

Residents of Lake Jackson, Texas, were warned not to use their domestic water for any purpose except to flush the toilet after a 'brain-eating' amoeba was detected in the city's water supply.

*Negleria fowleri* was suspected to be present in the local water supply after six-year-old Josiah McIntyre died on 8 September. Three out of 11 water samples tested positive for genetic material related to the amoeba, including a test of a water hose tap at McIntyre's

home. The other two positive samples were taken from a fire hydrant and the civic centre fountain, where the boy had been playing in late August before becoming ill.

The organism is found in warm fresh water, including lakes, rivers and hot springs, in addition to soil. Drinking contaminated water does not lead to infection, but accidental ingestion through the nostrils is usually how *nægléria fowleri* enters the body, from where it can travel to the brain, causing a condition known as primary amoebic meningoencephalitis (PAM), a rare but potentially lethal disease. Symptoms are similar to those of bacterial meningitis, and include severe headaches, fever, nausea, vomiting and disorientation. In the disease's later stages, seizures, hallucinations and coma may ensue. *abc13.com*, 26 Sept 2020.

### THE BONE COLLECTOR

Derek McMinn, a world-renowned surgeon who pioneered the hip resurfacing technique that doctors later used to save Andy Murray's tennis career, has been revealed to have collected and stored thousands of patients' body parts. A leaked report showed that over a period of 25 years, McMinn – who has treated politicians, sports stars, and celebrities – kept the bones of at least 5,224 patients he had operated on. He apparently admitted to

hospital bosses he had been keeping patient bones at his seven-bedroom farmhouse in Worcestershire, as well as at his business premises in Birmingham, with the full knowledge of his colleagues. He said he had kept the bones “for his retirement”, and hospital staff told investigators the body parts were intended to “keep his mind active”. He did not have a licence to store body parts, and had not obtained proper consent from patients or relatives.

Nurses, theatre staff and doctors in Birmingham's Edgbaston Hospital, where the surgeon carried out most of his operations, were apparently aware of what he was doing. Some staff even helped put bones from patients in special pots for McMinn's staff, according to the internal report for BMI Healthcare, who manage the hospital.

Because McMinn's actions appear to have been in breach of the Human Tissue Act, the case has been referred to police. A hospital insider said: “It's all been kept quiet, they've covered it up. There are lots of patients who haven't been told and who don't know he has their body parts. He was the goose that laid the golden egg. He generated an enormous amount of income for the hospital. He had been there a long time; it was almost his hospital really. It is shocking how this was allowed to happen for so long.” *Independent*, 29 Sept 2020.



ABOVE: Surgeon Derek McMinn had kept bones from over 5,000 patients.

# MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

## 255: THE CHRISTMAS LAMENT



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

### The myth

Christmas isn't what it used to be – but until recently, it was.

### The “truth”

What xmasologist Neil Armstrong of Teeside University called “the Christmas lament”, the belief that we've abandoned the true, traditional holiday and replaced it with something ghastly and perverted, is far from a modern development. Armstrong traced it back to 1616, when King James I of England made a speech decrying the dying of the old-school Xmas. In the Middle Ages and Tudor period, all wealthy families were expected to provide open-house banqueting to rich, poor and middling alike through the festival period. This was the essence of the English Christmas: hospitality, social unity, celebration. To what extent this actually happened is beside the point: precisely as people today believe that in (or just before) their own childhood there was an unchanging tradition of Christmas, which is now gone, so James was convinced that the old English Xmas of charity and good cheer was fading away. An emergent rich class preferred to spend a private Xmas in London, rather than at their country seats. There, they would entertain only their own family and close friends, their doors barred against the commons. As is usually the case in such laments, James saw this as emblematic of the end of the Good Old Days, not only in December but in general.

### Disclaimer

All history is contentious. We don't want to fall out with anyone at this special time, so please send any disagreements you may have with the above, gaily wrapped and temptingly bulging, to the letters page.

### Sources

*Christmas in Nineteenth-Century England*, by Neil Armstrong (MUP, 2010); [www.timetravel-britain.com/articles/christmas/jacobean.shtml](http://www.timetravel-britain.com/articles/christmas/jacobean.shtml)

### Mythchaser

From the illegality of mince pies to a ban on extra chairs in shopping centres, there are hundreds of absurd Xmas myths. But can you find one that's actually true?





KARL SHUKER investigates a mystery involving a seminal album and a thunderbird photo

### THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE GRATEFUL DEAD AND THE DEAD PTERODACTYL

One of the most tantalising fortaean mysteries is that of the missing thunderbird photograph – an elusive early picture supposedly snapped during the mid-1800s and depicting either a very large dead bird or a very large dead modern-day pterodactyl pinned with wings outstretched onto a barn with American Civil War soldiers posing in front of it, yet which despite having been reputedly seen by numerous people since then in various books or magazines cannot be traced anywhere. But what if this photo had appeared not in any publication but on the cover of a record album instead? This was the novel, hitherto-unconsidered prospect that I recently investigated, as exclusively revealed here.

It all began on 14 October 2020 when I received a message posted by Facebook follower Ari Sarkar on my FB 'fan' page that included the following fascinating statement: "The Workingman's Dead Sessions album by the Grateful Dead has the band posing with a dead pterodactyl. They are dressed in Civil-War era uniforms and the photo is suitably aged. It's completely bizarre!"

Wow! It was some hours before I logged onto FB and saw Ari's message, and although I replied straight away with a request for more information, no response came back. Despite not being a Dead Head (i.e. a dedicated Grateful Dead fan), I was familiar with their famous *Workingman's Dead* album, released in June 1970, and I knew that its cover simply contained a photograph of the band's members wearing factory attire and gathered outside a building in a San Francisco street, with any pterodactyl conspicuous only by its absence, as duly confirmed when I checked it online.

I also accessed what must surely be the most detailed online history behind the creation of that album cover photograph (written and posted by Bob Egan on his PopSpots website), but again, no pterodactyl was mentioned (although I did discover that an early, pre-finalised version of the photo actually contained a giant star-nosed mole, but this unexpected feature was deleted before the final photo was produced).

Nor could I find anywhere online *any* Grateful Dead album cover that depicted a dead pterodactyl, or any mention of a 'Workingman's Dead Sessions' album.

True, an official release of some of the *Workingman's Dead* sessions came out in July 2020 to celebrate the album's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary – but this is an online-only release, subtitled "The Angel's Share", and has no photo on its 'cover' at all. As far as I could determine, therefore, if the enigmatic pterodactyl-portrayed Grateful Dead Sessions album did exist, it was evidently not an official album, and might instead be an unofficial bootleg. Pursuing that possibility, however, I swiftly discovered

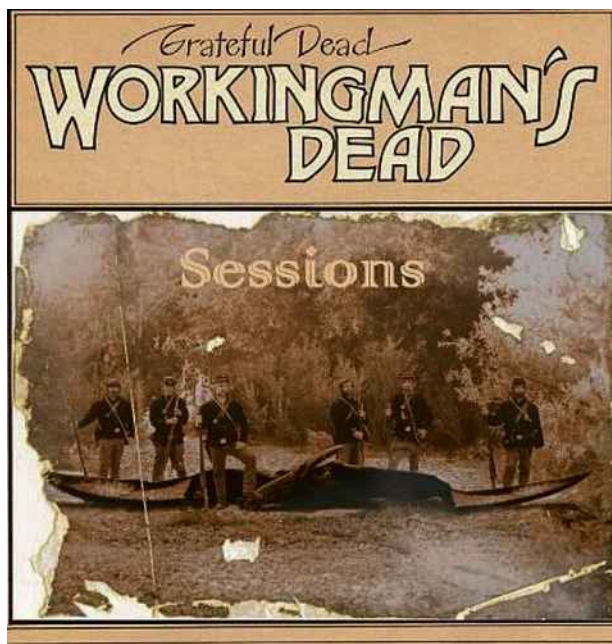
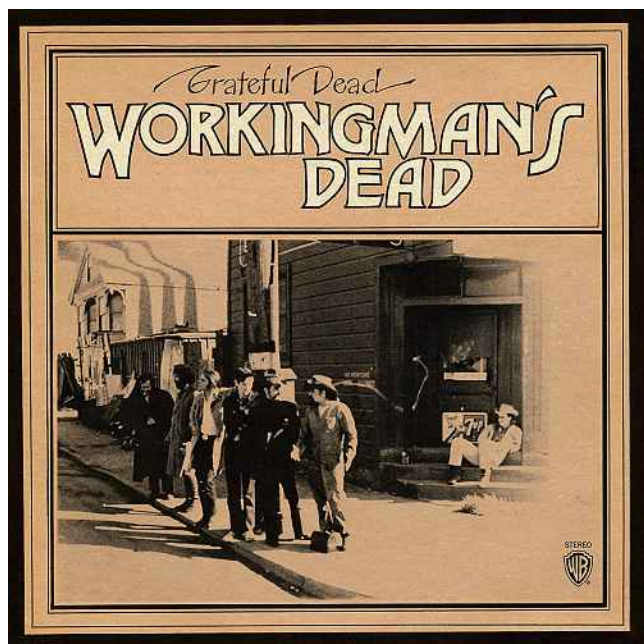
that it was not included on a list of Grateful Dead bootleg albums on the website Bootlegpedia, nor on an even more comprehensive bootleg listing on Discogs. So perhaps it was of exceedingly limited availability – or could it even be just a non-existent spoof? That is, merely a hoax album cover photograph created and posted online by someone as a joke.

On 15 October, I received a reply from Ari, who sent me a scan of its front cover, so that at last I could see it for myself. Amusingly, the picture used for it proved to be none other than the famous PTP (Pterosaur Photo) Civil War pterodactylian thunderbird photo (and



TOP: The famous Civil War thunderbird photo created for FreakyLinks. ABOVE: An earlier advance publicity photo also created for the programme using different actors and a physical pterodactyl model.

PHOTOS: FREAKYLINKS / 20TH CENTURY FILM PRODUCTION / REGENCY ENTERTAINMENT



ABOVE LEFT: The Grateful Dead photographed on a San Francisco street for the cover of 1970's *Workingman's Dead*. ABOVE RIGHT: Cover art for the unofficial release of *Workingman's Dead Sessions*, using one of the FreakyLinks pterodactyl photos. BELOW: A 1970 publicity shot of the band.

therefore did not feature the Grateful Dead band members at all). This image had been created specifically by a VFX company hired by the production design team at the American TV show *FreakyLinks* (produced by Haxan Films) to appear (as indeed it did) in the show's fourth episode, entitled 'Coelacanth This!' and first screened on 27 October 2000. The PTP photo should not be (but very often is) confused with an earlier, visually inferior Civil War pterodactylian thunderbird photo, featuring different actors as the Civil War soldiers plus a different pterodactyl, in the form of a physical model. This latter photo had also been created for *FreakyLinks*, but was used by them solely for advance publicity purposes, being included in their *FreakyLinks* website (which had been launched two years prior to the show's actual screening in order to promote it), but not actually appearing in the show itself. The pterodactyl model from that publicity photo is now housed at Loren Coleman's cryptozoology museum in Maine, USA.

The reason why two different Civil War pterodactyl photos associated with *FreakyLinks* exist is that the advance-publicity photo was created first, but seemingly there was subsequently a problem in obtaining talent releases for the actors featured in this photo, which would be needed if it were indeed to be shown in the episode. Also, the show's production designer apparently



### *An early version of the photo actually contained a giant star-nosed mole*

didn't think that the advance-publicity pterodactyl was very impressive. So Haxan hired the visual-effects company E=MC<sup>2</sup> Digital to create a second, better Civil War pterodactyl photo (which would then be shown in the episode), and signed up new actors to appear in it, yielding the PTP photo (the pterodactyl in it reputedly being a digitally-added image this time, rather than a physical model). So, to reiterate the key fact here: it was the PTP photo that was used in the actual episode, *not* the publicity photo. Brian Dunning revealed all of this and more concerning the two different photos

in a fascinating Skeptoid podcast of 9 January 2018.

On 17 October, I received another reply from Ari, stating: "I downloaded the album about 10 years ago from a (now defunct) bootleg site on blogspot. There was no other artwork apart from this cover and not even a back cover." So now we know – it was indeed a bootleg, and conceivably available in download format only. This would explain its absence from listings of physical bootleg albums.

The curious case of the Grateful Dead and the Dead Pterodactyl is duly solved, inasmuch as it certainly has nothing to do with the original missing thunderbird photograph from the 1800s after all. Conversely, if the missing thunderbird photo genuinely exists, it remains just as tenaciously elusive as ever.

My sincere thanks to Ari Arkar for kindly bringing all this to my attention.

*Ari Sarkar, pers. comm., 14+15+17 Oct 2020; <http://paleo.cc/paluxy/livptero.htm#Ptp-photo>; <http://bootlegpedia.com/en/artist/Grateful-Dead> 2019; <https://skeptoid.com/episodes/4605> 9 Jan 2018; [www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxtDX3ntroQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxtDX3ntroQ) uploaded 1 Feb 2015; [www.popspotsnyc.com/workingmans\\_dead/](http://www.popspotsnyc.com/workingmans_dead/) (n.d.); [www.discogs.com/label/263704-Not-On-Label-The-Grateful-Dead](http://www.discogs.com/label/263704-Not-On-Label-The-Grateful-Dead) (n.d.). For a detailed look at the genesis of *Workingman's Dead* in a series of podcasts, visit: [www.dead.net/deadcast](http://www.dead.net/deadcast).*

## NECROLOG

Cryptozoology loses a pioneering Russian researcher into mystery hominids, and we bid adieu to a French champion of forteana and science fiction



ABOVE LEFT: The founders of Russian hominology (left to right) Boris Porshnev, Alexander Mashkovtsev, Pyotr Smolin, Dmitri Bayanov, Marie-Jeanne Koffman. ABOVE RIGHT: Joseph Altairac.

#### DMITRI BAYANOV

Early on the morning of 4 June 2020, the world of hominid research was shocked by news that the renowned Russian hominologist Dmitri Bayanov had passed away three days earlier at the age of 88. He had been in failing health for some time and had suffered from a short period of congestive heart failure in recent months.

Bayanov was the science director at the International Centre of Hominology. His cryptozoological career focused primarily on the study of relict populations of hominids, including the Almas and the American Sasquatch. He theorised that the discovery of these relict hominids would prove to be a rediscovery of the hominids known in the 18th century as *Homo troglodytes* and *Homo sylvestris*.

Bayanov originally graduated from a teaching school in 1955 with a major in humanities. He worked first as a teacher and later as a Russian-English translator. After studying under such individuals as Professor BF Porshnev and PP Smolin, Chief Curator of the Darwin Museum in Moscow, Bayanov took part in Marie-Jeanne Koffman's expedition to the Caucasus Mountains in search of the Almas (see FT67:32-34). He later

made reconnaissance trips into the same region on his own. He served as an active member of the Relict Hominoid Research Seminar at the Darwin Museum until his death. His involvement with the group began in 1964 and he became its chairman in 1975. He was also a founding board member of the International Society of Cryptozoology in 1982 and served on its Board of Directors until 1992.

French cryptozoologist Michel Raynal notes: "Bayanov joined Ivan Sanderson, Boris Porshnev, Bernard Heuvelmans, Grover Krantz, and a few other big names in what he called hominology." Bayanov is credited with coining the terms hominology and hominologist in the early 1970s to describe the specific study of unknown hominoids and those who study them. He himself noted that "hominology is a branch of primatology, founded in the middle of the 20th century in science's 'no-man's land' between zoology and anthropology."

He was among the researchers who studied the famous Patterson/Gimlin Bigfoot film and found it to be authentic. In Christopher L Murphy's 2009 book, *Bigfoot Film Journal: A Detailed Account and Analysis of the Patterson/Gimlin Film Circumstances and Aftermath*,



Bayanov is credited with having coined the nickname "Patty" for the subject of the 1967 footage.

In the concluding remarks of Bayanov's presentation at the International Bigfoot Symposium in Willow Creek, California (12-14 Sept 2003), he said: "I think that one of the great scientific results of the 20th century was the discovery of relict hominids (homins, for short), popularly known as Abominable Snowman, Yeti, Yeren, Almas, Almasty, Bigfoot, Sasquatch, etc. Actually, it was a re-discovery by hominologists of what had been known to Western naturalists from antiquity to the middle of the 18th century, when wild bipedal primates were classified by Carl Linnaeus as *Homo troglodytes* (i.e., caveman) or *Homo sylvestris* (i.e., wood-man, forest-man). As for Eastern scholars and rural populations in many parts of the world, they have always been aware of wild hairy bipeds, known under diverse popular names. Hominology is primarily championed as a unique and necessary field of study by a handful of Russian scientists. They argue that resistance is based on fear; that is, that recognition of hominology would facilitate documentation of a relic 'homin' by making funding available. Documentation of a species

such as the Sasquatch would, in turn, precipitate an upheaval of longstanding evolutionary and palaeoanthropological theory, which explains in large part (in their view) the resistance to hominology and related efforts."

Bayanov was the author of a number of books in the field of hominology, including *In the Footsteps of the Russian Snowman* (1996), *America's Bigfoot: Fact not Fiction* (1997), *Bigfoot Research: The Russian Vision* (2011) and *Russian Hominology: The Bayanov Papers – Fact and Folklore* (2016). In 2019, his last book, *The Making of Hominology: A Science Whose Time Has Come* was published. Christopher Murphy served as editor.

*Dimitri Bayanov, hominologist and cryptozoologist; born Moscow, 18 Mar 1932, died Moscow 1 June 2020, aged 88.*

Loren Coleman

#### JOSEPH ALTAIRAC

French literary critic, author, essayist, professor of mathematics and erudite fortean Joseph Altairac died unexpectedly but peacefully in his sleep on 9 November in his apartment in Paris. Born in 1957 and affectionately addressed in French fortean and science fiction circles as 'Uncle Joe', he was one of the great scholars of science fiction, known for his encyclopædic knowledge. He was also secretary of the Prix Rosny-Aîné, a literary prize awarded since 1980 to French language works of science fiction.

Altairac's favourite writers included AE van Vogt, HG Wells and HP Lovecraft. During the 1990s, he published the fanzine *Études Lovecraftiennes*, considered the French equivalent of the US fanzine *Lovecraft Studies*. This led him to direct the *Cahiers d'Études Lovecraftiennes* series for French publisher Encre.

Altairac was also known for his painstaking dissection of



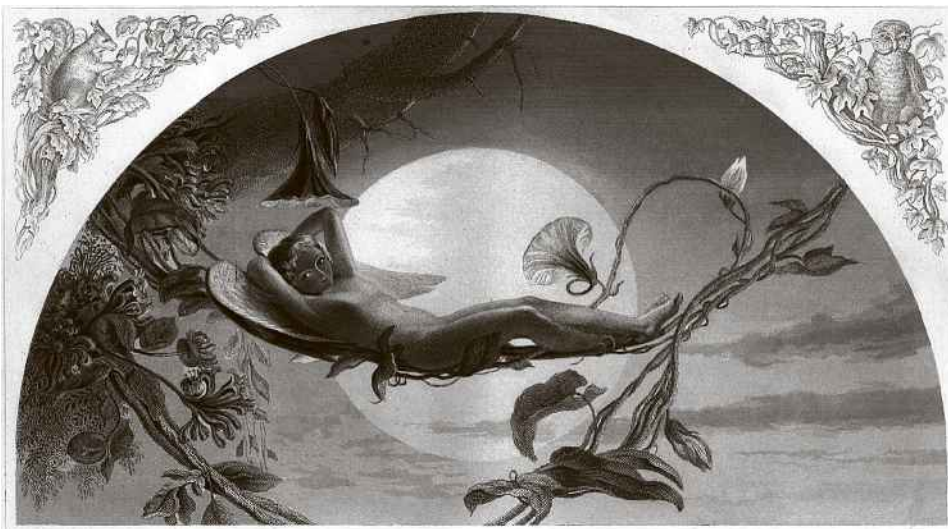
the Nazi UFO saga, which was published in 1997 as 'Un mythe technologique: la légende du V7'. Together with Guy Costes, he wrote *Les Terres Creuses*, a bibliography of Hollow Earth literature and lore, a seminal work numbering over 800 pages and with more than 2,000 entries; published in 2006, it is still unsurpassed. This was followed in 2018 by *Rétrodictions: encyclopédie de la conjecture romanesque rationnelle francophone, de Rabelais à Barjavel, 1532-1951*, a monumental two-part encyclopædia of French science fiction since Rabelais, numbering some 2,500 pages and the result of 40 years of study and research. With this title, Altairac and Costes won the Grand Prix l'Imaginaire in 2019, a French award for science fiction literature and works of the imagination.

Altairac also wrote about Jacques Bergier (1912-1978), a French fortean with a passion for science fiction who claimed to have corresponded with Lovecraft. Bergier found fame with the 1960 book *Le Matin des Magiciens*, co-written with François Pauwels, which quickly became a cult classic in France and later an international bestseller. It was after reading it that Altairac became passionately interested in forteana and ufology. He also edited two anthologies of Bergier's writings.

He regularly published articles in the small French specialist science fiction press, in magazines such as *Rocambole* and with publishing houses such as l'Oeil du Sphinx. He was often seen at SF conferences, where he regularly took the microphone, or at second-hand Parisian book markets, hunting for obscure treasures. Not only tremendously erudite, Altairac was also widely known for his kind nature, immense generosity and easy approachability.

*Joseph Altairac, writer, essayist, professor of mathematics, fortean and science fiction connoisseur, born Pézenas, France, 25 Mar 1957; died Paris, 9 Nov 2020, aged 63.*

Theo Pajmans



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

### CH-CH-CHANGES

There were, in times gone by, three different kinds of British shape-changers: the furries, the mischief-makers and the scarers.

The furries (so named for their two main characteristics, fur and fury) were four-legged with shaggy coats and had great eyes: their appearance portended death or some other calamity. The mischief-makers liked to lead humans down the wrong path or, in horse form, they tricked humans into riding them (the rider usually ended up in the ditch). We have, then, the scarers, whose joy it was to terrify night-walkers by rapidly changing form. The furries did not shift shape in a dramatic way. They were often compared to dogs, sometimes to bears, donkeys, horses, lions, sheep, bulls, cows and calves. They were 'in between': not really belonging to any of these species. If they slid, with decorum, from one form to another, they remained mammalian. Mischief-makers and scarers had a much more impressive range and made more radical jumps. They did dogs, donkeys and sheep, of course. But they also managed other animals (cats, rabbits, fish, birds), fire and the human form. There were, too, weirder options in their repertoire including houses, carts and rags on hedges. If there was a difference between the mischief-maker's and the scarer's form-flipping it was that scarers had a penchant for the grotesque:

THE SCARERS  
HAD A PENCHANT  
FOR THE  
GROTESQUE: IF  
YOU WERE A DOG,  
YOU WERE A DOG  
WITH NO HEAD

if you were a dog, you were a dog without a head; if you were a woman you were dressed in black and lacked legs... There was a logic of sorts here: the scarer was usually a spirit of the dead and was, in some senses, incomplete.

The reader will have noted that I have put these three types of shape-changer in the past tense. I have done so for the simple reason

that they no longer exist. In the 19th-century there are striking first-hand experiences of encounters in the British countryside with all three of these types. We should no more dismiss encounters in the 1800s than we would dismiss a UFO experience in the 2000s. By the Great War, though, the British shape-changer had all but disappeared. The furry of yore has been hammered down into one form: 'black dogs' no longer moonlight as horses or lions. The mischief-maker has entirely vanished, save

possibly in some descriptions of walkers at night being pixy-led. The scarers are now the impoverished ghosts of road and lane, their shape-changing glory days past. The lesson? Fortean experiences are a human constant; but like the 19th-century shape-changers, they balloon and shrink into new forms.

All this leads me to wonder how things will be different when FT reaches 800 issues. My confident prediction? Expect change, not progress. New forms, but no answers.

Simon has edited *Sheridan Le Fanu's Scary Fairy Tales: Four Tales of Fairy Horror* (2020).

# THE C NSPIRASPHERE

**NOEL ROONEY** looks at the uneasy post-election political landscape in the USA and wonders what will now become of the biggest conspiracy theory of the Trump years...

## Q AFTER DONALD

A lot of people have no doubt been speculating on what might happen to QAnon, and their cryptic prophet, if the Donald is forced out of the White House. Will the already fissiparous community break up without the focal point of their devotion? Well, now that Trump has reluctantly acknowledged that Biden won the election (even if he hasn't quite brought himself, at the time of writing, to actually concede) we are poised to find out.

It seems unlikely that the secret war against the Deep State can go on with its leader confined to Twitter, premature election campaigns and reality TV. But Q has been so signally centred on Trump that it is very hard to see an alternative figurehead. And in any case, if Trump is about to be evicted, is the Q clearance patriot leaving with him?

We will have to wait for Q's thoughts on the matter. The Q drops went dark the day before the election, and did not start up again until 10 days afterwards, when their main focus was, unsurprisingly, on cheer-leading the efforts to see, or believe in, election fraud. There is a new slogan: nothing can stop what is coming (which makes for an even clumsier abbreviation than WWG1WGA, though that hasn't hindered its adoption). But there is not much of substance, and certainly no indication about Q's future in post-Donald America.

Q's period of silence coincided uncannily with the departure of Ron Watkins from his post as moderator of 8-Kun, the platform Q has been using since the demise of 8-Chan. Perhaps Ron saw the writing on the wall (not a difficult task since rumour has it that he put it there) but there are plenty of voices in the Conspirasphere



## *The Q drops went dark the day before the election*

claiming that he and his father have had some kind of bust-up over the Q content that, it is alleged, they have been writing ever since they acquired it from Paul Furber. Ron says he has quit in order to pursue a career in carpentry, however, and we wish him well. At least in his new vocation he has more of a chance of hitting the nail on the head.

Q's is not the only hiatus consequent on the election of Joe Biden. In the days leading up to polling, the US media and the Democratic Party were very busy telling stories about probable Russian interference in the process. Those voices have fallen instantly silent now that Joe has won. A jaundiced observer might be forgiven for thinking that the whole Russiagate 2.0 thing was a conspiracist hedge against the unlikely prospect of the Democrats losing; otherwise it's hard to see how a story that had so much traction could simply die (to quote the late, great Max Wall) "like a louse in a Russian's beard".

The Chinese have got off pretty lightly too. Back before the interminable count, a number of media outlets reported US intelligence effectively saying: if Trump wins, it's the Russians; if Biden wins, it's the Chinese. Perhaps the right-wing media, and the alt-right version of it, are too busy with the minutiae of election fraud to bother for now; the alt-right, in fact, are so busy with the application of Benford's Law that they have even forgotten to big up the prospect of imminent civil war. There was one story doing the rounds that the Chinese government is shutting down the social media accounts of people speculating about US election fraud, but this singular tale fits so ill with the public and government perception of China that no one has bothered to repeat it.

And talking of China, whatever happened to all those stories (and indignant refutations) about Hunter Biden? Some in the Conspirasphere probably feel that the mainstream media, and the social media giants, did such a good job of suppressing the story that it's not worth trying anymore. On the other hand, it's Hunter, and the boy just can't help himself. The chances of Joe getting through four years without his son blotting the Biden copy-book are

even more remote than the probability of 139,000 late postal votes allegedly coming in 100% for the Democrats in Michigan (that would be Benford's Law in operation, apparently).

Which brings up an interesting point. One might expect the right to mutter about fraud when their candidate loses, and to offer what appears to be evidence to support their complaint. But stories about election fraud have been appearing in places that are not exactly known as alt-right- or Trump-friendly. Wouldn't it be deliciously ironic (if terrifying in real-world terms) if the election result the majority of Americans wanted to see was fatally undermined by skulduggery of the Democrats' own making? The US electoral system has never looked robust, of course; real anomalies and instances of fairly widespread malpractice seem to accompany every election. But this would be a very delicate time for the clearly jury-rigged system to collapse under the weight of reluctant investigation.

Before we bid farewell to President Don, we should perhaps applaud him for what appears to be one positive aspect of his term. Trump is the first US president in an extremely long time (there are respectable historians who will tell you ever) who has not committed the military to a new conflict somewhere in the world. So maybe on this particular issue (for which much of the world has breathed a four-year sigh of relief) Donald really did have those schemers in the Deep State biting their little fingers.

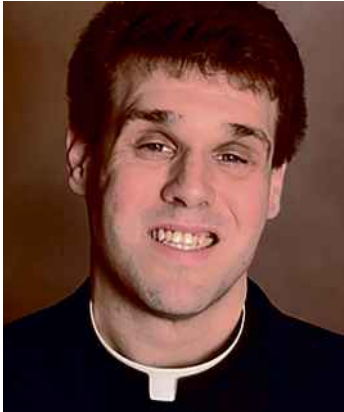
**SOURCES:** [www.dailydot.com/debug/qanon-election-2020-8kun-ron-watkins/](http://www.dailydot.com/debug/qanon-election-2020-8kun-ron-watkins/); [www.conspiracy.news/2020-11-15-china-censors-netizens-debate-alleged-us-election-fraud.html](http://www.conspiracy.news/2020-11-15-china-censors-netizens-debate-alleged-us-election-fraud.html); [www.informationclearinghouse.info/55867.htm](http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/55867.htm)



# UNHOLY PASSIONS

Priest indulges in a “demonic” threesome on the altar, while a Chinese sex toy may pose a risk of accidental penile lockdown

ST TAMMANY PARISH SHERIFF'S OFFICE



ABOVE: The unholy threesome. BELOW: Lock up your bits: the Cellmate Chastity Cage.

## THREE ON AN ALTAR

A Louisiana priest has been arrested after reportedly filming himself having sex with two dominatrices on a church altar. Reverend Travis Clark, 37, and the two women involved – Mindy Dixon, 41, an adult film performer, and Melissa Cheng, 23 – have all been charged with obscenity. The trio were allegedly discovered *in flagrante delicto* on the night of 30 September after a passer-by noticed that the lights were on later than usual at Saints Peter and Paul Roman Catholic Church in Pearl River near New Orleans. Peeping inside, the witness claims to have seen the semi-nude pastor having sex on the altar with two women dressed in corsets and high-heeled boots. Sex toys were also visible, and the proceedings were being filmed by a mobile phone mounted on a tripod, the altar illuminated by stage lights. Police officers called to the church were told by Ms Dixon and Ms Cheng that the trio had been filming a “roleplay” with the pastor, but it has been reported that Ms Dixon wrote in a social media post prior to the incident that she was going to the New Orleans area to “defile a house of God”.

Rev Clark, appointed in July 2019 as the church’s 13th pastor, was released on a \$25,000 bond while Ms Cheng and Dixon posted bonds of \$7,500. He is currently in hiding at his parents’ house. If found guilty of obscenity, each could face a

maximum of three years in jail.

Two weeks after the alleged incident, Archbishop Gregory Aymond celebrated Mass on 10 October and reconsecrated the church and its new altar, the previous one having been removed and burned the day before. Before beginning Mass, the visibly upset archbishop told the congregation: “The desecration of this church and altar is demonic, demonic. Let me be clear, there is no excuse for what took place here. It is sinful, and it is totally unacceptable. Travis has been unfaithful to his vocation; he’s violated his commitment to celibacy; and also, he was using that which was holy to do demonic things.”

The archbishop blessed the people and the church with holy water. He used chrism oil and incense to bless the new altar and placed a relic of Saints Peter and Paul inside the altar. “The church is a very holy place and when a church has been used for unholy things and has been desecrated, we must drive away the evil spirit,” he said. *Independent*, 9 Oct; *clarionherald.org*, 10 Oct; *D.Mail*, 15 Oct 2020.

## ACCIDENTAL LOCKDOWN

The Cellmate Chastity Cage, a hi-tech male chastity belt, has been sold via several big-name online retailers as well as specialist sex shops. It is produced by Qiui, a self-described “innovative sex toy” manufacturer based in Guangdong, China. Their website

bears the slogan ‘Qiui chastity: love hurts’ and the following mission statement: “Qiui believes that a true chastity experience is one that keeps the wearer away from control over their own devices.”

Qiui currently offer four products: the Cellmate Chastity Cage (Long and Short versions), both retailing at \$189, while for a more modest outlay, a Secure Ring may be purchased for \$20, available in both large and small sizes. Qiui claim the new Cellmate Chastity Cage is an improvement on their original Bluetooth chastity cage, as proximity is no longer necessary for the key holder, and that “no physical keys [are] needed to enjoy chastity”. Instead, the new model allows the user to “authorise a keyholder from any part of the world to gain control over your cage”.

Unfortunately, a security flaw in the device has been discovered that meant it would have been possible for a hacker to remotely lock all the Cellmates currently in use simultaneously. The Internet-linked sheath has no manual override, so owners might have had to resort to the use of a grinder or bolt cutter to free themselves from its metal grip. Any other attempts to cut through the contraption’s plastic body could pose a risk of bodily injury.

Fortunately, after a team of UK security professionals exposed the bug, the sex toy’s app has been fixed by its Chinese developer. They have also published a workaround for people still using the old version of the app who could potentially find themselves locked in as a result of a malicious hacker’s interference: it involves prising open the circuit board and pressing batteries against two of the wires to trigger a motor.

Pen Test Partners (PTP), the Buckingham-based cyber-security firm who discovered the app’s glitch, have a reputation for solving quirky IT problems, and have previously highlighted difficulties with other sex toys. PTP say their latest discovery shows that manufacturers and developers of ‘smart’ adult-themed products still have lessons to learn. “The problem is that manufacturers of these other toys sometimes rush their products to market,” remarked Alex Lomas, a PTP researcher. “Most times the problem is a disclosure of sensitive personal data, but in this case, you can get physically locked in.”

The chastity cage works by wirelessly connecting to a smartphone via Bluetooth, used to trigger the device’s lock-and-clamp mechanism; but the software required sends commands to and from the manufacturer’s server, which, PTP discovered, can be tricked into disclosing each device owner’s registered name and other personal details, as well as a unique code assigned to each device and the co-ordinates of every location from where the app had been used. This hacked information could be misused so that the server ignored requests to unlock any of the chastity cages.

To date, there is no evidence that malicious hackers have exploited the security risk. But one online reviewer, who appeared to have

become locked in his cage due to an unrelated bug, said he had been left with “a bad scar that took nearly a month of recovery”. Based on the data they discovered pertaining to each device’s unique code and their locations, PTP believe around 40,000 devices have been sold worldwide. *BBC News*, 6 Oct 2020.





# Down on Jollity Farm

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

## A TREE FULL OF PARROTS

I have long remarked that ufology tells you more about ufologists than it does about UFOs – whatever they may be – and reports of the last several weeks tend to bear out the observation. One thing ufologists can be depended upon to do is repeat one another, not always altogether reliably: hence, they resemble parrots rather more than mynah birds, who are very precise and not recommended for inclusion in the households of errant husbands, fractious wives or stropky teenagers, lest they alarm one's dinner guests with intimate and outspoken details.

So one may expect, over the years to come, some garbled version of the 'fact' that the late Phil Klass, arch-scurge of ufologists, was "as queer as an Irish three-pound note". According to Richard Dolan and Kathleen Marden, Klass had an 'inappropriate' relationship with a Russian spy of the male persuasion, and the Russian gent used this liaison to blackmail Klass into spreading 'UFO disinformation' – i.e. debunking. This suggests that the Russians knew, or know, something about UFOs that the rest of us don't, which would be hard to substantiate. Unfortunately, neither Dolan nor Marden has shown themselves that strong on substantive evidence yet.

Besides which, there is personal observation to take into account. Robert Sheaffer reports that he once asked Klass why he had never married. The response was along the lines of "I didn't want to limit myself to one woman"; which seems fair enough. He did, in fact, eventually marry, at the tender age of 60. Sheaffer also reports that Klass lost no time in chatting up attractive ladies at social gatherings. I can personally report that, as I ambled with them across Russell Square, he and Jim Moseley kept up a constant stream of commentary on the young females who came within their purview. Even I was a trifle startled at their somewhat antiquated, not to say somewhat chauvinist, outlook. Not that I didn't appreciate the lineaments of the targets of their lubricious gaze: I just would have preferred to mine their encyclopædic knowledge of ufology and compare responses.

Anyway, who cares whether Klass was gay or not? Some folks talked, and some folks whispered, but 'everyone knew' that James Randi was gay long before he admitted as much – but did anyone care? The truly daft part of the Dolan-Marden wheeze – apart from Klass's supposed gaiety – is that the Russians would have thought UFOs more important than trying to winkle military secrets



ABOVE LEFT: Phil Klass: probably not an agent of Russia disinfo. ABOVE RIGHT: Ozzy Osbourne: pyramid worries.

out of him (and Klass was probably hoping to do the same with his Soviet counterpart). Klass had his finger in all sorts of classified pies (one reason why *Aviation Week*, where he was a senior editor, was dubbed *Aviation Leak*). Of course, he'd have a nice lunch or two with a Russian diplomat. Who in his position would not? He told the FBI that's what he was doing and (shock, horror) they didn't mind. Now consider the time frame. Klass announced his \$10,000 prize for proving an extraterrestrial presence on Earth in 1966. Let's assume this is when the Reds gnashed on to him, though we note in passing that Klass never had much to say about what *they* had to say about UFOs – perhaps because they had nothing to say. In round terms, the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990. Soviet spies may stay on station for a long time for all I know, but a quarter of a century of enforced silence, while all about him over the period public attitudes and general tolerance – not to say indifference – to homosexuality were changing all the time for the more enlightened: does blackmail seem terribly likely?

It is an unfortunate truth that Klass was not always the nicest of guys and from time to time played not-quite-clean tricks on what he facetiously termed his "political enemies", notably Dr James Macdonald and Stanton Friedman. That doesn't make him a Soviet disinformation agent. Still less does it make him gay. Dolan and Marden's loopy hypothesis looks for all the world like an anachronistic attempt to smear him. That sadly doesn't mean their outdated bit of mud won't stick.

## GAYS FROM THE STARS?

From an allegedly gay ufologist to a dearth of gay aliens. This question, or curiosity, was raised by Rich Reynolds on UFO UpDates. As



well from having an interest in UFOs, it turns out he's a Freudian psychoanalyst, so could be said to have a professional interest in the matter. He enquires: "Has there ever been any overt sexual activity noted by witnesses of debarked UFO beings or during a supposed 'abduction'? ... Also, no one has indicated an alien smear of homosexuality; that is, I recall no testimony from experiencers or observers that hinted at gay bonding among extraterrestrial beings. One would expect that an authentic observation of beings from elsewhere would show, at least once or twice, sexual impulses if any, unless human (and flora/fauna) sexuality is unique to this planet, just as culture and behavioural patterns are."

While granting that reports of aliens bonking are rarer than the proverbial hen's teeth, there is hardly a shortage of accounts of aliens engaging in all manner of rumpy-pumpy with their human captives. Some people have taken pleasure in these encounters, and many have not (see my "Fifty Shades of Gray", **FT296:30-37**) So there's no doubt that 'aliens' are interested in human sexuality. That doesn't mean they're not interested in their own: they may have what we'd call a Victorian sense of modesty. Can you imagine Mr Gladstone, or even the flamboyant Disraeli, putting on such an exhibition? I think not.

## BEWARE THE PYRAMIDS

Ozzy Osbourne has come up with a new one re: UFOs. Despite more than seven decades of people consistently reporting disc-shaped things in the sky – interspersed with the rarer flying triangles – he has asked this on YouTube: "What if they built a replica of what the ship looked like out of stone? So they wanted to train everybody about the fucking pyramids. It could be." Well, you can't prove it ain't.



# I'm an alien... get me into here

JENNY RANGLES starts to untangle a web of weird connections to Gwrych Castle in North Wales

The first photograph that I took at the age of 11 was on an old Kodak Brownie camera, and by fortan coincidence it was linked to themes that would come to dominate my life. They are worth relating here, as in Autumn 2020 fate decreed a connection with UFOs thanks to long-running ITV series *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here*, the programme presented by comedy duo Ant and Dec, who starred in the movie *Alien Autopsy* (see **FT395:32-36**), loosely based on dubious footage of an alien body supposedly recovered from the Roswell crash.

In August, the UK media went to town with news that the Covid pandemic had prevented *I'm A Celebrity* filming deep in the Australian bush as it had for two decades. Given its 11 million viewers, ITV decided to find the show a new home in a 'top secret' location. That new home proved to be the very spot where my 1963 photograph was taken on a caravan holiday to North Wales and which was now, the media claimed, haunted by UFOs and other supernatural phenomena. It was Gwrych Castle in Abergele, a once palatial, now largely ruined, 19th century building on the coast that held multiple connections for me.

One national newspaper referred to the Gwrych Castle campsite as having been "targetted" in a "chilling alien invasion", and said that a spaceship had "landed there"; which, when you know the alleged event occurred 30 miles (48km) away seems like artistic licence, to say the least. Another report even claimed the castle was attracting UFO enthusiasts to settle nearby. Well, the reason I lived there between 2002 and 2014 had absolutely nothing to do with UFOs: it was because my mother had worked for a charity with a base just a few hundred yards from the castle and I used to help her raise funds for them. When she wanted to retire to the coast, it was an area we knew well.

As for the evidence of a hotspot around the castle, it included a sighting in 1988 at Dwygyfylchi, 10 miles (16km) down the coast, where three boys saw a swiftly moving 'flying saucer' cross the hills. Then there was the story of an undersea UFO base at Puffin Island, even farther away off the coast of Anglesey, where some claim to have watched UFOs diving in and out of the Irish Sea like gulls (as perhaps, some actually were). One UFO researcher even told the media that alien bodies might have been recovered from this location during an



exercise that coincided with the infamous events of January 1974 in the Berwyn Mountains around the village of Llandrillo (see **FT252:30-35**). The whole media story of the 'UFO castle' was pretty thin. The sightings mentioned are no different from others you could find in any location over a few decades, especially if distance is no object. They also missed more telling connections that might actually be a little extraordinary.

Back in the 1970s, we had a family caravan at Llandrillo – the small village linked via Berwyn to Gwrych and Puffin Island. When staying here we saw many 'UFOs' – most were actually low-level training missions from RAF Shawbury in Shropshire or RAF Valley on Anglesey. Peter Hough and I gave a talk to airmen and officers at RAF Shawbury at their request and had an interesting chat about how exercises sometimes were mistaken for UFOs. This was just amusing for the RAF fliers, who also knew that army ground exercises on the Berwyn Mountains using flares and searchlights could confuse witnesses. They understood how these things triggered myths and legends, but their main concern was to defend the UK.

So the media seeking an angle and linking the TV show with ET was nothing new, but they seemingly didn't know that one of Britain's most famous alien contact witnesses – a dedicated researcher for decades – had actually lived within yards of the castle. In fact, I was kindly allowed to stay at her home in Kent, before she moved to Abergele, when I attended the London premiere of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* – decades before, by chance, I ended up living less than a mile from her at Gwrych Castle.

This was all just a coincidence, of course – I wasn't 'lured' to Gwrych by ET – as was the fact that I also filmed my final TV show (on aliens) near the castle in 2005. Not for a moment did I contemplate any hidden meaning in such events; although, when

LEFT: *Coronation Street* legends Arthur Leslie and Doris Speed (Jack and Annie Walker), photographed at Gwrych Castle in 1963.

they reach a certain number, you do start to wonder – as I am now doing.

UFOs have been seen flying over Abergele itself – as is true of pretty much anywhere. In the years I lived there, I investigated several, reported some in this column and even filmed a mysterious 'phantom aircraft' (not a flying saucer; I witnessed countless flights over the coast that were certainly odd, but clearly terrestrial).

However, Gwrych Castle has plenty of real associations with the paranormal and these inevitably factor into my links with the place. As well as that first photo I took in the castle grounds – which happened to be of actors Doris Speed and Arthur Leslie, who played the first tenants of the Rovers Return Inn, Jack and Annie Walker – there was another link to what in 1963 was a brand-new ITV soap: *Coronation Street*. The actors happened to be there that day, and by chance the mother of Pat Phoenix (who played Elsie Tanner in the soap alongside them) was a neighbour as I grew up. Pat used to come and visit her often and so I wanted to show her my photo on her next visit; it's why I'd been so eager to take it.

This was not my only link to the TV series still gripping millions of viewers six decades later. MUFORA, the Manchester UFO group, used to plan case investigations in the studios and I chatted with several of the *Coronation Street* cast about the paranormal, including Pat Phoenix, whom I invited onto my radio show. The only cast member still in *Corrie* who was there back in 1963 – Bill Roache, aka 'Ken Barlow' – even attended one of our lectures. Many felt the set was possessed and *Most Haunted* filmed a vigil there.

However, this was far in the future on the day I took that photo at Gwrych. What I could not know then was how life would connect me both to Gwrych Castle and its supernatural associations in many more weird ways. And even that *Coronation Street* would play a fortan joke of its own.

As I was writing this column, a new *Corrie* storyline made me chuckle: it was set in a caravan at Abergele, but filmed in Stockport – the place I moved to from Abergele in 2014! Yet that coincidence was just amusing and nothing compared with the spooky things to follow – a story with darkly weird overtones that I will tell next month...

# BLASTS FROM THE PAST

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FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

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## WHO KILLED CLAUDE KENDALL? THE MYSTERY MURDER OF CHARLES FORT'S PUBLISHER

**THEO PAIJMANS** digs through the New York papers from 1937 to reopen the files on an unsolved homicide

Millions of Americans celebrated Thanksgiving in the comfort of their homes on 25 November 1937, but for one man fate reserved a different outcome. That same night, in a room on the eighth floor of a New York hotel, Claude Kendall was brutally beaten to death. At that time, he was a New York publisher of some repute. He had brought sensational books to the fore, like Octave Mirbeau's *Torture Garden* and *Twisted Clay*, a controversial novel featuring a female psychopath on a rampage, including patricide, prostitution, drugs and suicide. The book was even banned in Australia and Canada. Today he is especially remembered as the man who published Charles Fort's last two books, *Lo!* and *Wild Talents*.

Described at the time of his death as "a publisher of esoteric literature" and of moderately successful mystery thrillers,<sup>1</sup> Kendall had also earned a less savoury reputation in some quarters: "Speaking of the late Claude Kendall, the publisher of books definitely more spicy and erotic, if you please, than exotic or esoteric... what kind of books was the late Mr Kendall most noted as publishing? Well, the Tiffany Thayer stripe, wasn't he? – the sort which one reads avidly in private and hastily stuffs in the bureau drawer when little Johnny comes running in with his 10-year-old curiosity..."<sup>2</sup> It was a view that persisted after his death. In his biography of Fort, Damon Knight calls him "a rather dubious publisher", but he doesn't explain why.<sup>3</sup>

On the morning of 25 November, shortly before noon, a chambermaid going about her rounds in the Madison Hotel turned the key of room 820 and found Kendall's lifeless body. He was sprawled on the floor with a bed sheet wrapped loosely around his neck. He was fully clothed, had his shoes on and his



FAR LEFT: Claude Kendall.  
LEFT: Howard Stephenson.

### Kendall's behaviour became more erratic after he published Fort's third book, and he claimed he was being plagued by strange telephone calls

belongings were undisturbed. Strangely, when the police arrived at the scene, Police Inspector Michael FM Dermott was quick to decide that this was not a case of homicide. Kendall could have fallen from the bed or against a piece of furniture, he suggested.<sup>4</sup>

The autopsy performed by the medical examiner proved otherwise. Someone had so savagely beaten and kicked Kendall's face that he suffered from multiple hæmorrhages in the head. As a result, his larynx was so damaged that it had swelled and suffocated him. Someone had also beaten his legs and stomach and scratched his face. Who had done this? And why?

The police quickly established a timeline of what Kendall had been up to in the hours before he was murdered. He was known as a habitual drinker, and the night of his death was not unusual in that respect. He attended a Thanksgiving eve party in a room on another floor in the hotel, where he drank heavily. Around half past midnight,

two friends carried him up to his room and left him there to sleep it off. But two hours later Kendall staggered out of the hotel for more drink. An elevator operator remembered how he returned with a "slightly built youthful white man" and went up to his room; he also recalled that he had not brought the young man back down from the eighth-floor murder room that night. Neither did the desk clerk see the stranger leave. But others remembered how, at half past four, sounds began to emanate from Kendall's room.<sup>5</sup> Fiction writer Richard Barry and his wife rented a room on the floor above Kendall's. They heard "thumping noises" coming from his room. The noises continued, at intervals, for about 15 minutes.<sup>6</sup>

Kendall's death had become a murder investigation, and the mysterious young man who had been with him in his last moments was the prime suspect. But the suspect turned out to be not much of a stranger at all. The press certainly hinted as much, describing him as "a habitué of a restaurant below the slain

man's hotel room" and "a familiar figure in the Madison Square district where Kendall lived". New York detectives even confidently predicted "an early arrest" of the man the press had baptised the "phantom-like slugger".<sup>7</sup>

Two days after the murder, police hauled in not one but two suspects. They were subjected to an intense interrogation that lasted all day. Who they were and what was said is curiously absent from the usually very nosy New York press reports. The suspects were released, though,<sup>8</sup> and when asked for an update the next day, the police shrugged that they had no new developments to report.<sup>9</sup>

With that, the press dropped the case. The still unsolved murder mystery evaporated from the newspaper pages after only four days. To this date, Claude Kendall's murder remains unsolved. One man claimed to hold the answer to the riddle, though, and he told his story on the anniversary of Kendall's death. His name was Howard Stephenson, and he was said to have been a personal friend of Kendall. What he related is even more bizarre than the mystery of why Fort's publisher was murdered.

According to Stephenson, Kendall's behaviour became increasingly erratic after he published Fort's third book, *Lo!*, and he claimed he was being plagued by strange telephone calls. Let Stephenson take us back:

"The time is 1932. In Kendall's publishing office on Fifth Avenue an enormous aquarium occupies the entire sill of a wide window. The glass has been frosted and care is taken that the occupants of the aquarium do not get too much sun... He gestures towards the

aquarium.

'My Martian fishes,' he exclaims.

'Oh, tropical fish?'

Kendall laughs uneasily.

'Not tropical; fishes from Mars. You've read *Lo!* of course?'

'Yes, I reviewed it for my paper. But surely – these are not – you mean, those rains of fish and strange larvæ the author discussed?'

Kendall's eyes, blue and staring, are full on my face.

'Do you know,' he says abruptly, 'I think I shall tell you about the sequel to *Lo!* which Charles Fort is preparing.'

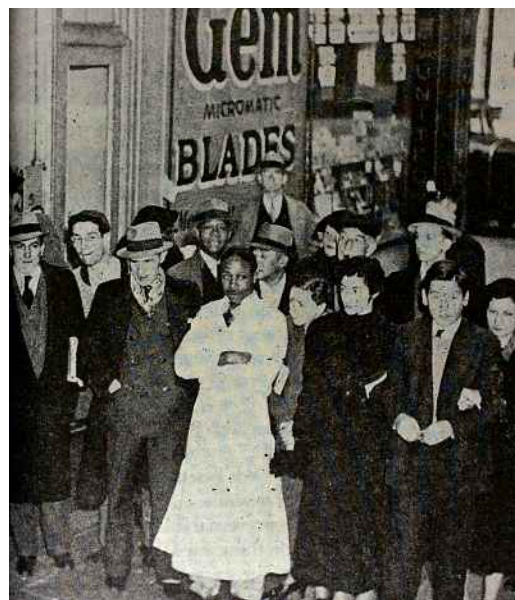
The phone rings stridently. We are interrupted. There is a shadow on Kendall's face when he comes again from his desk.

'I am rung up so frequently,' he says, with a trace of plaintiveness, 'only to find nobody calling...'”<sup>10</sup>

Then, discussing the books of Alexandra David-Neel, Stephenson makes a sceptical remark. "Kendall's large eyes slowly turn toward me. 'But some things are unexplainable,' he says slowly. 'You know, during my South American days, I fell and broke a leg under peculiar' – His mouth snaps shut. He laughs uneasily, turns the conversation in a new direction."

When Stephenson visited Kendall's office a second time, the aquarium with the Martian fishes was gone. Kendall was preparing the publication of Stephenson's novel, but from then on any progress in the matter was communicated only through letters. Stephenson got the impression that Kendall wanted to avoid him, because of something dark and sinister lurking in Fort's background.

Stephenson suggested that Fort had dug up "occult secrets" and, as a consequence, had attracted the attention of "evil forces". Now, "a ghostly doom" followed both Fort and Kendall like a curse. Fort's death coincided with the publication of his *Wild Talents*



ABOVE: Kendall's coffin is carried from the Madison Hotel while crowds look on. BELOW: The 1938 issue of *True Mystic Science* in which Howard Stephenson's bizarre article about Kendall's death appeared.

Stephenson claimed, and the evil force had it in for Fort's publisher as well: "Failure and disaster had dogged Claude Kendall. Was some unseen, malevolent power resentful of the weird disclosures of the occult which these men, author and publisher, had dared to make?"

Taking a cue from Fort, he suggested that Kendall's murderer might not even be a living visitor at all. "Wild talents, retribution for revealing strange things which men may not discuss, death by malevolence of the unseen – a conjecture," Stephenson writes. "Could that same force, materialised for a few moments to an elevator man, 'pick from existence' the author's friend and publisher?" he wondered.<sup>11</sup>

We'll probably never know who killed Charles Fort's publisher and Stephenson's bizarre speculations certainly don't help. But perhaps a motive can be found. I discussed Kendall's mystery

death with genealogist Robert Steingraber from Syracuse, New York. Conducting genealogical research on behalf of Kendall's relatives, he learned of the murder and told me his theory:

"Being a gay man myself, I recognised some 'clues' in the story. Claude was unmarried. The alleged killer was 'known' to hotel staff.

Probably he had been in the hotel before with other men. He also was a 'familiar figure' in the Madison Square district, so he may have been a 'hustler' looking for paid gay sex. He may not have intended to kill

Kendall, but beat him up to get away and avoid arrest. The cause of death was asphyxia, so Kendall might still have been alive when the killer left. I think all this was covered up out of concern for the family."

Why the hotel might have suppressed a gay murder on their premises was obvious, according to Steingraber: "It feared a bad press. The lack of any follow-up tells me it was

likely purposefully withheld from the public. I think it was a hook-up gone bad, or perhaps the stranger was only playing gay to rob a smartly dressed man. It was the Depression era, after all. Perhaps they just drank together, and he figured Claude would fall asleep and he'd rob him, but Claude woke up and a fight started. In any case, there is a gay element to it. Definitely on Claude's part. It's just the stranger we don't know."<sup>12</sup>

Kendall's tragic and mysterious death may have been a terrible accident, or perhaps a hate crime; certainly, its subsequent cover-up would appear to have been caused by the intolerance of homosexuality that was widespread at the time.

Kendall's brother travelled to New York and brought his body to Watertown for burial. The Madison Hotel still stands, but any traces of the murder have long since receded into the dim past and room 820 has kept its secrets. The unsolved mystery of Kendall's murder became part of fortune – the very field he helped to create by publishing Fort's last books.

## NOTES

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2 'Definitely Esoteric', *The Daily Times-News*,

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3 Damon Knight, *Charles Fort, Prophet of the Unexplained*, 1971, p.178.

4 'Ex Navy Officer Found Slain in Midtown Hotel', *Daily News*, New York, 26 Nov 1937.

5 Publisher Slain,

Autopsy Proves', *Daily News*, 27 Nov 1937; 'Publisher Slain, Autopsy Shows', *New York Times*, 27 Nov 1937; 'Hotel Slaying Of CH Kendall Puzzles Police', *Post-Star*, Glens Falls, NY, 27 Nov 1937.

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7 'Kendall Death Clues Traced', *Knickerbocker News*, Albany, NY, 27 Nov; 'Police to Make NY Slaying Arrest', *Plain Speaker*, Hazleton, PA, 27 Nov 1937; 'Hotel Slaying Of CH Kendall Puzzles Police', *Post-Star*,

Glens Falls, NY, 27 Nov 1937.

8 'Free 2 Suspects in Kendall Death', *Daily News*, New York, 28 Nov 1937.

9 *Dunkirk Evening Observer*, Dunkirk, NY, 29 Nov 1937.

10 Howard Stephenson, 'Death Was Their Shadow',

*True Mystic Science*, vol.1, no.1, Nov 1938, pp.56-59.

11 Ibid.

12 Email correspondence with Robert Steingraber, 2-8 Aug 2016, 2-5 Nov 2020.

# WITNESSED

*Fortean Times* has been publishing first-hand accounts of strange phenomena since 1979. These "It Happened To Me" narratives have become one of the most popular elements of the magazine over the last 40 years, as well as performing a useful fortean function: many witnesses are reassured that they have not lost their marbles when others relate similar experiences. To celebrate our 400th issue, we offer a small selection of our favourite stories. All images by Etienne Gilfillan.

## IT'S NOT FOR YOO-HOO

I work for a government body in electronic engineering, specifically concerning equipment like fax machines. In 1989 I was paged over the building public address to go to my office as there was a call waiting. The conversation went as follows:

"Mr Haines?"

"Yes."

"It's about the order for teleprinter paper you placed at the exhibition."

"No I didn't. I wasn't there."

"That is Mr DA Haines, spelt HAINES?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's your name on the order."

"It can't be. I don't deal with teleprinters, only fax machines."

"Your telephone number is 708 2399 extension 35?"

"Yes, that's my number alright."

"And you are Mr Dave Haines?"

"No, it's Dale, actually."

"Well, it looks like Dave. Anyway that's what it says here, 10 boxes of paper for British Telecom Stores."

"I don't work for BT, I work for — —."

"Oh! It says BT in the order, Birmingham depot."

"Where?"

"Birmingham."

"What number did you dial?"

"021 708 2399 extension 35."

"You've got 01 708 2399 extension 35. This is south London, not Birmingham. You dropped the 2 from the number."

"Oh, sorry. Goodbye."

Click, buzz, whirr.

**Dale Haines**

*Bromley, Kent 1992*

## CB SAVIOUR

In August 1987 I was living in St Louis, Missouri, and I had to make a trip to Indianapolis for my divorce hearing. I left right after work on a Thursday evening and was travelling eastbound on Highway 70 through Illinois and into Indianapolis, listening to the



## "AS I LEFT THE PHONE BOX I SAW IT WAS COVERED WITH SNAILS"

radio and singing out loud as I do when I'm driving alone. All of the sudden a very clear 'voice' in my head said, "Turn on the CB".

I wasn't in the mood to listen to the CB so I just thought, well, that was weird and shrugged it off. Not 15 seconds later the 'voice' said, "Turn on the CB!" with an air of urgency. Again, I ignored it. A few seconds later the 'voice' screamed in my head "TURN ON THE CB!!" Not sure what was causing

it or what to do, I turned the CB on. The first and only thing I heard was a man's voice saying: "We have a drunk with no headlights travelling westbound in the fast lane of eastbound Highway 70. He just passed mile marker 178."

As this was said, I looked up and saw the mile marker 177 sign. I instantly moved to the far right lane, and not more than two seconds later the drunk flew past me, heading in the wrong direction, in the lane I had just been in. I have no doubt that the warning saved my life that night.

**Rhonda L Perry**  
*by email, 2002*

## SNAIL HAIL

The following incident happened when I was a student living in Walthamstow, east London. It was either in the autumn of 1985 or the spring of 1986. I was ringing my mother from an old phone box by the Shern Hall Methodist Church, on the junction of Shernhall Street and Oliver Road. It was early evening, and a light rain began to fall. Suddenly, I heard a knock on the phone box. Assuming it was somebody waiting to use the phone, I turned around, but couldn't see anybody. A few moments later I again heard a knock, but again couldn't see anybody. The knocks continued at intervals of five or 10 minutes, but I didn't pay them much attention.

I was on the phone for about an hour. As I left the phone box I saw that it was covered with snails. I think they were common banded snails. As a life sciences student, I could have taken a specimen home to identify, but I was too unnerved by the whole experience to be thinking logically. There were also snails on the ground in a small area (about one metre in radius) around the phone box. It looked as if the snails had fallen onto the phone box and some had crawled away. I couldn't see any other snails in the vicinity. I wonder if the metal phone box had somehow attracted the fall of snails.

**Ms KJ Kimberly,**  
*Dagenham, Essex, 1996*



## TINFOIL GIANT

A friend and I had an unusual experience in June 2003 in West Sussex. The time was approximately 10pm; almost dark, but with some twilight remaining. We were coming back from another friend's house along a section of country road we have driven individually many times before. My friend was driving and I sat in the passenger seat. We slowed for a tight left-hand bend in the road and as we turned it, driving at this point at about 20mph (32km/h), the headlights caught someone moving amongst the trees on the outside of the bend. I was about to say "Did you see that?" but my friend had already confirmed he had (with an expletive best not shared here). We only caught a brief glimpse of the 'person', but it was one of the most bizarre things I've ever seen, for two reasons: first and foremost, the person's size, which was staggering and, indeed, what initially made us catch our breath. The figure was at least 8ft (2.4m) tall, and while from our brief observation it was hard to make an accurate estimate, he was clearly larger than he should have been, perspectivewise.

It was all too quick to notice any particular facial features; he was virtually facing us, but looking slightly down as the lights shone on him, and seemed to be stepping sideways over something in the undergrowth, as his right leg was moving upwards and sideways. The other very unusual aspect was that the headlights reflected a large glare off his clothing, which seemed to be shiny, almost like foil.

It all happened so fast, but there was no doubt what we'd seen was very strange. My friend and I confirmed to each other what we had both witnessed and, after a couple of moments of indecision, he reversed back to the bend and pointed the headlights into the trees approximately where we had seen the figure. All appeared normal. I even got out of the car and called (to my friend's fervent objection; I'd had some Dutch courage that night, but he was sober), but no one seemed to be moving about in the woods and there was no trace of anything. We talked excitedly about it on the way home, but it got forgotten as these things do.

I don't personally believe in extraterrestrials, so for my own part I've ruled out anything like that, and being a fairly practically-minded person I've come up with various explanations, such as kids mucking about. But the problem of size keeps coming back – I even checked the Internet the following week to see if 8ft-plus people were more common



## "HIS CLOTHING APPEARED TO BE SHINY, ALMOST LIKE FOIL"

than I'd thought, rationalising that it was some weirdo in a foil suit. It certainly wasn't any kind of model, because it was definitely animated. I'm still puzzling over it.

*Name withheld  
by email, 2003*

## RAPTURE OF THE DEEP

As well as being my birthday, 23 August had a special significance for me in 1971. I was serving with the Royal Air Force in Malta and most of my spare time was devoted to the excellent diving club, run strictly to British subaqua rules.

I was one of four instructors in the club of about 140 members and my immediate boss was an experienced diving officer called John, known affectionately as 'the old man of the sea'. An expedition was planned for a six-week period to explore the coast around Gozo, a small island off the coast. One of the sites chosen was a small inlet in Xlendi Bay, searching for Punic and Roman wrecks.

The initial dive on the site by myself and another instructor called Bob revealed that we would be diving at depths often in excess of 130ft (40m). As there was no decompression chamber on Gozo, strict diving procedures would have to be followed. We were testing out an Italian decompression meter that John thought was unreliable.

The descent to 130ft was uneventful and all was going to plan when Bob's demand valve started acting up, restricting his intake of air. Against all the rules, he indicated to me to stay down while he surfaced and sent down the standby diver to keep me company. I swam around for a while looking for anything of interest on the rocky ocean floor. I saw a light ahead of me and was drawn to it both by curiosity and by what seemed to be an unknown force.

Over the next ridge and much further down, I saw a very beautiful young woman, tall and slim, with a lovely figure, standing at the entrance to a large cave. She was dressed in what looked like a white Indian sari; she wore sandals, her hair was plaited, and her wrists were adorned with various bracelets. It was as if the whole thing was stage-managed. The incandescence of the sur-

rounding area added to the serenity and calm of the sight before me.

I thought that I must be suffering from 'the narcs', nitrogen narcosis, described in the early days of diving as 'the rapture of the deep', a feeling of euphoria, closely resembling drunkenness. As a very experienced instructor with more than 200 deep dives under my belt I realised that I was in deep trouble, deep being the operative word.

A look at my depth gauge revealed that I was 230ft (70m) down. The Italian decompression meter strapped to my wrist had long since given up, as it was full of water. Fascination at what I saw overruled my training and my immediate need for an ascent and decompression procedures.

Then she spoke. "Hello, I have been waiting for you, do not be afraid, I mean you no harm, with me you are safe". I backed away, but she smiled, walked towards me and held out her hand. It felt warm, sensual and safe, and my fear disappeared.

"When you return to me I will be waiting for you, then you will stay with me forever. I have a gift for you". She handed me a small jar about 5in (13cm) tall shaped like an amphora, which I took from her with my other hand. "Now you must go. You will always be safe for your return to me," she said. As I ascended, I saw her waving as she slowly faded from view into the azure depth. After a very long decompression stop aided by a spare set of air cylinders it was explanation time: the

needle on the depth gauge registered 235ft (72m).

"Faulty gauge," said John, "because if it isn't you are in a lot of trouble, with that sort of depth on the clock you had better stay within camp area and keep someone with you in case of any bends problem."

About one week later I was summoned by John, who told me that the depth gauge had been tested and was completely accurate and serviceable, making my dive the longest and deepest in club history. Why I did not get the bends was a mystery to him. He also told me that Mr Mallia, the curator of the archaeological section of the Malta national museum, had identified the jar I had retrieved as a Phœnician scent jar of about 2000 BC, used by the royal ladies of that time. The mystery was that its contents still smelled fresh, the potter's stamp on the side of the handle was crystal clear and the jar was described in the report as being in mint condition. John was curious where I had got it. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you," I said.

In September 1995, I revisited Xlendi Bay and swam out to the entrance of the bay for old time's sake. The next day, on my return to England, I suffered a severe heart attack. I was very fortunate to survive.

**Ian Skinner**  
*Hull, Yorkshire, 1996*

## MEETING THE REAPER

In 1986, I was 17 and studying engineering at Brooklands technical college. One evening, I was walking along the path from the college to the train station. I had either left early or had been delayed. Normally, the footpath would have been heaving with students eager to get home, but I was alone. About a third of the way along the path, I decided to relieve myself against a tree. As I did so, I looked back to see if anyone was coming. It was twilight, but light enough to see. Someone was coming from over the brow of the hill, but too far to worry about, so I carried on.

I looked back again and noticed the figure had gained some 30-odd yards (27m). Thinking that it must be someone on a bike to have travelled that distance so quickly, I took one last glance before finishing and the figure had gained a lot of ground again. I walked back to the path and picked up my bag. Taking a quick glance again (thinking I should have heard a chain, tyres, that sort of thing), instead I was confronted by what can only be described as "the Grim Reaper" without the scythe.

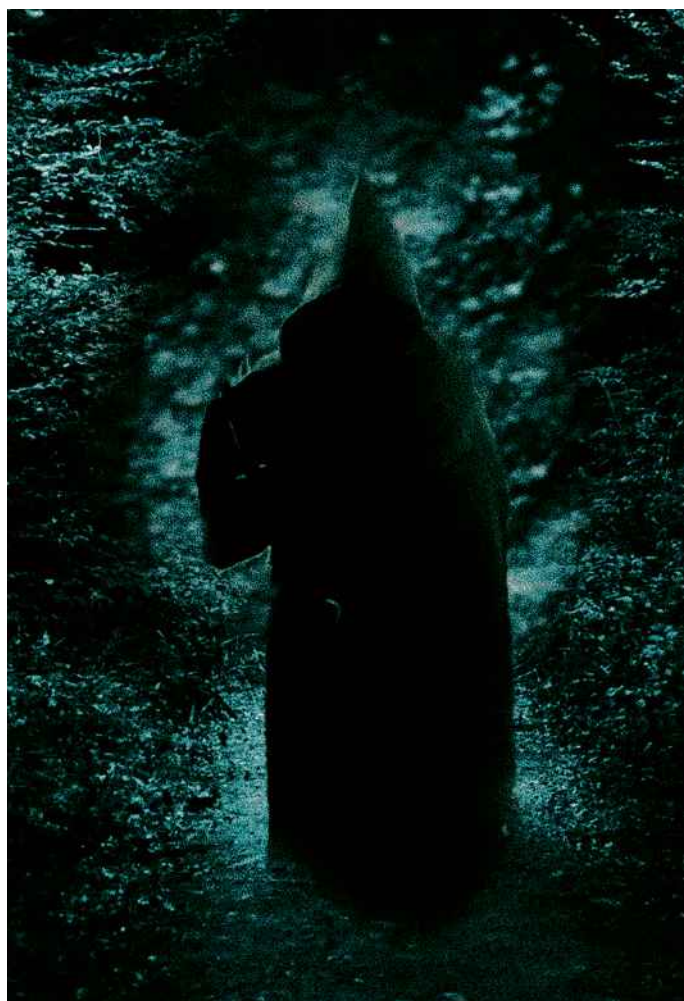
The figure was wearing a hesian-type cloak with a black hood over the face. The cloak reached

the ground and was hung over the body in a triangular-shaped fashion. I then realised that every time I had seen the figure it had been motionless as it was now, standing just 10 yards (9m) from me. It was more than 8ft (2.4m) tall. I should have been scared, but instead found myself almost drawn to it and took a step forward. We faced each other for what seemed like a few minutes but was probably only 20 seconds. When I came to my senses, I turned and gingerly jogged away without looking back. I reached a gate where I waited for the figure, thinking I might have been involved in a wind-up, but nothing happened.

**Mark Sidwells**  
*By email, 2001*

## SCHOOL WITCH

When I was at primary school in Nottinghamshire in the 1970s I had a teacher who left an impression more vivid than most. It was a very small school with only two classes and this teacher, a young woman, came in to take charge of the lower class, which included me. The first thing she did was to tell us that our soft toys came alive in our bedrooms at night when we were sleeping, and they played and danced around our sleeping selves. We didn't believe her straight away but she was quite adamant this was true and there was quite a serious discussion about it that left one or two of the kids quite awestruck.



Not much noteworthy about that, but this teacher definitely had something slightly spooky about her (besides always wearing head-to-toe black, as I recall) that filtered back to parents and gave at least one of my friends nightmares.

Her big impression came at Christmas time. Word went round beforehand that this teacher had something planned for the party. There was a partition between the classrooms that was opened up after lunch one day, and the entire school of about 30 sat on chairs arranged around the edge of the rooms. 'Miss X' sat on the edge of the circle where the classrooms met while the headmaster handed her a long pole that was used to open the catches on upper windows with a brass hook at one end. All the curtains were drawn shut, so the room was dim. The headmaster said that she was going to 'catch' spirits. Holding the pole at one end with both hands, she closed her eyes and went into a trance, then started slowly whirling the pole around, calling out to the spirits she was evidently trying to reach. As her 'performance' intensified, the pole hook was smashed against the floor on each quickening rotation, Miss X shouting and working up into a frenzy, seated all the while.

This scene of her, with her splayed legs covered by an ankle-length black skirt, rolling her head and calling out as the pole's hooked end smashed against the floorboards is seared into my memory. Of course the kids – and probably the other teachers – had never seen anything like this before, and I can definitely say that I haven't seen anything like it since! The kids were pretty shocked by what was going on, some might have cried, so after no more than a minute of this the headmaster stepped in. The pole was taken off Miss X, the curtains were drawn back, and normal festive games resumed.

Unsurprisingly, there was a parental fuss over the episode. Miss X left very soon after and things returned to normal, until the school closed within a few months and subsequently became a tearoom. I went there for lunch recently, and while finding the same floorboards on which our witch teacher smashed her 'spirit hook', wondered what inspired her to do such a thing and what became of her.

**Jerry Glover**  
*Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire, 2011*

## SPECTRAL SOCK SWIPER

In 1959 when I was 19 years old, I visited Alnwick in Northumberland to see a friend. One afternoon, at about 2pm, I was

waiting for a bus in very bad weather with thick snow everywhere. Standing to my right was an elderly lady. She wore a long black dress and shawl around her shoulders, her hair pulled back in a bun, her face very thin with deep, tired and sunken eyes. She commented on the cold day and then asked me if she could have a couple of pairs of socks. It was only then that I noticed that her feet were bare. I took off my socks and handed them to her. She thanked me, put them on and as I stood there watching she simply vanished into thin air! Needless to say my socks went with her.

I presumed she had died in or near that spot and that other people had seen her; perhaps many pairs of socks were now in her spirit possession. I was glad to help this poor unfortunate lady and maybe ease the pain of this earthbound soul. Throughout the encounter, she looked as real and as solid as a living human being.

**Mrs VA Martin**

*Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, 1998*

## WELLINGTON RETURNS

I am a home-visiting private tutor of music. About seven years ago, I began teaching electronic organ to Ian, a retired police officer. His instrument was located in a small annex and was flush against a wall. During the lesson I would sit to his right and slightly behind him, about 3ft (1m) from, and facing, the same wall. Immediately in front of me was a door. To my right was an adjoining wall at right angles to the other wall. My chair was touching this.

In the course of the fifth weekly visit and while listening to Ian's organ work, my attention was drawn to the door in front of me, which on this day was ajar by about 8in (20cm). A large white and tan cat was slowly walking through the gap. Somehow, I hadn't noticed it pass my chair. Recalling that my pupil had previously said he owned a cat and that it was incontinent, I followed it immediately, at the same time explaining my actions to him. The room was, in fact, a tiny closet with toilet facilities. There was no other door, no sign of the cat and no way it could have doubled back past me. I came out from the closet.

My host had run from the room, but returned promptly, holding a black cat. "I thought you were mistaken," he said. "I knew the cat was asleep in the other room". "The cat I saw was white and tan", I said, "not black". His reaction to this observation was



## "WHAT YOU SAW WAS MY OLD CAT WELLINGTON. HE DIED YEARS AGO"

startling. He dropped the cat, and clasped his hands together. "Thank God!" he positively shouted, "Now I know I'm not insane! What you saw was my old cat, Wellington. He died six years ago and is buried outside. Since he died, I have seen him and felt him brush against me on many occasions. My wife thinks I'm mad. My son thinks I'm mad. Oh, thank you so much!"

**Roy C Cotterill**

*Orrell, Lancashire, 2003*

## EERIE HOUSE CALL

In 1962, I stayed for several months in one of the narrow Georgian houses on Bathwick Hill on the outskirts of Bath. My husband, my daughter and two rather noisy dachshunds were also in the house, but nevertheless I often felt uneasy.

One cold November morning soon after Guy Fawkes' Night, my dog Rudi suffered a virulent stomach upset. His companion, Liese, was unaffected, but Rudi grew notice-

ably worse and I obtained the number of the nearest vet from Directory Enquiries. The vets' receptionist told me that a number of dogs in the area were being effected by some form of epidemic, but though every surgery was jammed she thought it might be possible to arrange a visit.

It was 7.30 and very misty when the vet arrived – an extraordinarily pale young man, tall, slightly built and somewhat taciturn – indeed, curt to the point of rudeness. He placed Rudi on the table in the basement kitchen and the dog stopped whimpering almost immediately.

After a minute or two the vet lifted him down and taking a small box from his bag broke his silence to tell me that the tablets it contained were to be taken every four hours. He said that the dog had developed a particularly nasty form of gastric upset, and for 48 hours he must be given no solid food. He would, however, recover if he took all the tablets. Considerably relieved, I tried to make light conversation as we went back upstairs, but he offered no response. As he went out into the foggy night, he didn't even say goodbye.

The tablets worked well, and within a matter of hours Rudi was himself again. The following morning, I rang the vet with the good

news. The receptionist said the epidemic was very much worse; she was sorry no one had yet been able to look at my dog, but someone would be calling later in the day. I told her a vet had already been, but she insisted I must be mistaken. Their Mr X, Mr Y and Mr Z had all been occupied in other directions; but she promised to check. She soon called back to confirm that no one from the practice had called at a house on Bathwick Hill at any time in the previous week.

I contacted Directory Enquiries and by luck reached the same woman I had spoken to the day before. She remembered giving me the number – just that one number – but suggested that with such a mystery it would be worth checking other vets. She assembled a list of every vet for miles around, which I double-checked with a borrowed copy of Yellow Pages. I rang them all, and drew a blank.

Rudi made a full and speedy recovery. What the tablets were I never found out, but at least they were tangible and extraordinarily effective. The young man had left without mentioning payment and I assumed I would receive a bill, but while we remained in that house – for a further three months – no bill arrived.

Perhaps the vet was visiting from another dimension; or maybe he was one of those people, frequently medical practitioners, who are said sometimes to be whisked through space, without their knowledge, to render help where it's needed. We'll prob-

ably never know – unless there's an ageing veterinary surgeon who recalls mislaying half an hour of his life one November evening 37 years ago.

**Ida Pollock**

*Launceston-by-Looe, Cornwall, 1999*

## TIME-LAPSE ENCOUNTER

In the summer of 1988 or 1989 when I was 18 or 19, I used to go out with a girl who lived about two miles away in the Greater Manchester area. There were two ways to get there, one through a semi-rural area, the other along a main road. As it was a pleasant summer's evening, I decided to take the semi-rural route. Around seven o'clock, I passed a farmhouse and was approaching a bridge over a railway when walking towards me I noticed a man wearing plus-fours, a flat cap and pushing an old-fashioned wooden wheelbarrow. As he came nearer, we started to look at each other with a sense of puzzlement. As I had long hair, I was used to being looked at in a strange manner and for my part, he did look rather odd. Assuming he was from the farm, I carried on walking.

Then two women dressed in what I can only describe as late Victorian/early Edwardian dresses and wide brimmed hats came walking towards me. Again, we regarded one another with a sense of bemusement without uttering a word and passed each other by.

After taking a few more steps, I turned around for another look, assuming by this stage I had happened upon some guests on their way to a fancy-dress party. They had disappeared. There wasn't time for them to have reached the farmhouse, which was the nearest building. Unless they had darted into a field and hid behind a wall, there was no way they could have disappeared from view so quickly.

Feeling a bit shaken, I hurried on to my girlfriend's, where my tale was greeted with a certain degree of mockery. The area where I lived was not up for historical re-enactments and this style of clothing was certainly not *de rigueur* in late 1980s Greater Manchester.

**Lee Stansfield**

*Stockport, 2003*

## THAILAND TWIN

I studied travel industry management at a small US mountain college from 1990 to 1995. There was an exchange programme with a university in Thailand, and in my last year of study I went to Chiang Mai in northern Thailand for a resort internship and then spent another week with a

friend in Bangkok. Since graduating and returning from Thailand, I lost contact with many of my former friends until recently.

I received an indignant email a few months ago from my friend in Bangkok asking me why I hadn't informed him that I was visiting his city. He said he was stuck in a traffic jam on Sukhumvit Road – Bangkok's most important road and cosmopolitan area – when I had walked directly beside his car a few feet from him, which afforded him a face-to-face, close-up view. He rolled down his window and waved and spoke to me, but I was totally unresponsive and kept walking.

This was someone whom I knew very well over a period of many years and he would easily recognise my Anglo-Welsh face anywhere, but especially amongst a crowd of Thais where I would have stood out. My doppelgänger was dressed in my manner, had the same type of haircut and mannerisms, and my distinctive walk. I emailed him back assuring him that I was in the USA at the time of this sighting and had not been anywhere near Bangkok for over eight years; but to this day he insists that it was, in his words, "a hundred per cent you".

This is only the most recent example of my doppelgänger making an appearance. About two years ago I was having blood drawn for routine medical tests when the attending nurses welcomed me back into the laboratory and asked me to please be more co-operative this time while being stuck with

a syringe. I asked what they meant. It seems that I had been in just a bit earlier that same morning and had put up quite a fight while having my blood drawn, which is totally out of character for me. The nurses both insisted that not only did the earlier patient look and talk exactly like me but had on the exact same clothes as I was wearing. I assured them that it wasn't me because I was in my GP's office during that time; to which they replied that I must then have an identical twin in town who shopped in the same clothing stores as I did.

**Alex Jones**

*Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2003*

## AN OFFAL EXPERIENCE

Here is a report of a very strange night in the early autumn of 1989. At about 1:30am we were driving along a country highway between Montevallo and Alabaster in Alabama. It was overcast and there was an oppressive feeling to the air. We both became uneasy, but chalked it up to nerves. As we continued to drive, the impression that something wasn't as it should be increased, and I drove faster, eager to get out of the country stretch of the road and into a lit-up area. I was a student at the University of Montevallo at the time and I had driven that road hundreds of times, but that night it felt different.

When we got to the intersection of Highway 31 with I-59, we smelled a horrible stench and I began to lose traction on the road, which seemed wet, although it had not rained recently. Slowing to turn into the Coosa Mart, I noticed that the road was covered in offal. There was an area about 400 yards (366m) long covered in animal parts, organs and viscera (at least I hope they weren't human). They smelled bad, but not really rotten. It was a strange smell like ozone and sulphur mixed with faeces and, well, meat.

We pulled into the Coosa Mart and asked if the clerk had noticed anything. We thought maybe a truck from a meat-packing plant had crashed, but all the clerk said was he thought he had heard it raining very hard, but when he had looked out, the parking lot was dry. Soon after, a truck driver came in and also remarked on the offal in the road. We called the local police to see if someone could clean up the mess. As my friend and I had to get into Birmingham and were already running late, we left before the police showed up.

The next day I went by to ask about what happened and there was no evidence at all that there had been anything odd. They said the clerk had quit. I mentioned it sometime later to one of the Alabaster police officers and he



said he didn't know anything about it, and suggested I not go bothering anyone else about it or they might think I was crazy and "lock me up".

As I was driving back to Montevallo, I noticed what seemed to be deep holes in a pattern resembling footprints crossing a field and then crossing Highway 115. The holes in the field were surrounded by churned earth, but on the road they seemed melted into the asphalt. A road crew was already busy filling them in. Whatever it was had a stride of about 8ft (2.4m) and left "footprints" about 16in (41cm) across. For several years the pattern of footprints in the road was visible as the patches were darker than the surrounding road. Then they repaved the entire road. I asked around school and all anyone could tell me was they had heard there had been a one-car crash there the night we saw the offal, and that the car had burned.

**Mark Warner**

*Ooltewah, Tennessee, 2000*

## AN ANGRY GHOST

Following my divorce, our two-year-old twins and I were obliged to go into rented accommodation. Having settled the girls at the local playgroup and started my self-employed new career in the Lincolnshire village, I was loath to go far and couldn't believe my luck when a 19th-century farm-worker's cottage came up for rent next to the church. I could afford the rent and, although a little isolated, it was in a lovely position and clean and tidy.

We moved in on a cold April day in 1991. I turned the heating up full and lit the fire in the sitting room as the place had quite a chill. I then set about unpacking in the kitchen looking out onto the beautiful west end of the church and graveyard. I could hear the girls chattering away to themselves and exploring the rooms. Eventually they joined me in the kitchen.

"Do you like our new house?" I asked, keen to get their approval.

They looked at one another, made a grave face and said very quietly: "We like the house, but we don't like the lady on the stairs".

The hair on the back of my neck stood up. "What lady? There is no lady here, just us – this is our house now."

They looked unconvinced. "No, there is a lady, in a long brown dress with long brown hair pulled over her face, and she's angry, she's very angry, she doesn't want us here!"

I could see they were getting upset and so decided not to question them any further; I assumed they were unnerved by the change of surroundings and thought 'the lady' would go away.

But she didn't. Night after night they talk-



## "SHE'S ANGRY, SHE'S VERY ANGRY, AND SHE DOESN'T WANT US HERE"

ed about her, where she was in the house, what she was doing and saying, and how she was getting more and more angry. I saw nothing, but several times when I went into a room I got the feeling someone had just left ... also a fleeting smell of pipe tobacco smoke ... strange for a lady.

One night I had a friend visit. She needed to use the upstairs bathroom and I gave her directions. I couldn't believe how quickly she returned, nor how pale she was. She said nothing to me until we left the house but then she told me she walked into a cold damp mist on the upstairs landing that took her breath away.

The bedroom light switch was over near the door, so every time I went to bed, it was a quick glance round the room, switch off the light, dive into bed and pull the covers over my head, and hope the girls didn't call for me in the night. One night, I had just performed this routine when I heard a rustling noise followed by a huge bang. My heart was pounding so much I thought it would explode, but I knew I had to get out of bed and switch the light on. I found a mirror had come off the wall and slid down behind

the dressing table. I laughed with relief until some kind soul the next day told me that ghosts hate mirrors.

In a vain attempt to catch the girls out, I questioned them separately to see if the lady was a twin imaginary friend, but they always had exactly the same story – where she was and what she said. After four months in the cottage, I couldn't stand it any longer and decided to forfeit the remaining three months' rent and move to a modern property nearer the centre of the village. I was apprehensive that the lady would come with us ... but she didn't, and the twins never mentioned her again.

For weeks, I tried to fathom the mystery. I asked the locals and did research on the area. No one had experienced anything unusual in the cottage before; however, I did discover it was built on the site of the old monastic priory.

**Di Ablewhite**

*Long Bennington, Nottinghamshire, 2010*

## LOST ON GROUNDHOG DAY

About five years ago, my ex-girlfriend was working in a bar in the centre of Dublin. She usually worked until the bar closed and

would then walk about a mile home to the flat she was sharing on the outskirts of the city. One night as she was walking home, a car pulled up slowly behind her, the driver rolled down the window and asked her for the directions to a nearby hotel. She gave the man directions, walked home and went to bed. The following night, at *exactly* the same time, in *exactly* the same place, the *same* man, wearing the *same* clothes asked her for the *same* directions and headed off that way once again. Needless to say, it freaked the hell out of her as it did me.

**Jamie Davis**

*Dalkey, Co. Dublin, 2003*

## ID CARD ODDITY

Yesterday [4 August 2005] I went to put some rubbish in the bin outside my block of flats. The dustmen had emptied the bin the previous day and at the bottom of the bin I observed an ID card and three discs. The card belonged to Ian Graham, who worked for Huntingdon Council. I had last seen him 25 years previously when I was in a punk band called The Destructors. I was going to phone a friend who knew Ian to tell him I'd found his card, but my pay-as-you-go phone had run out of credit, so I put off the task until I could top up my phone the next day.

That night, I worked until 2am at the Metropolitan Club in Peterborough and as a result I overslept and missed my lift to work in Huntingdon on Friday morning, so I caught the train. A man leaving the station in front

of me looked familiar, so I walked up to him and asked if he was Ian Graham – and it was. I told him about the ID card. It turned out that he had thrown out a lot of stuff and his card had gone with the rubbish. The card had obviously been to the rubbish dump. There are 10 dustbins outside my block of flats; so what are the chances that it would end up in my bin, I would know the owner, and the next day run into him on a train I rarely catch?

**Alan Adams**

*Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, 2005*

## PRAM TURNS A CORNER

A friend and I witnessed the following bizarre event when we were in Marland Hill Primary School in Rochdale, Lancashire, in the early 1990s. The main entrance was surrounded by a concrete football pitch and a descending grass verge – which, after a wooden fence, led onto Roch Mills Crescent. The day and time escape me – presumably sometime in the afternoon after lunch – but I do remember that both of us were standing on the edge of the football pitch by the grass verge overlooking the Crescent. I can't recall what we were discussing, but it must have been important to me as despite my friend's desperation to have me look across the road I wouldn't stop talking and do so until he swore at me. While the event didn't last very long I remember time seeming to drag as I tried to make sense of it.

When I turned to look at Roch Mills Crescent I saw an old fashioned blue pram, the material ripped and worn, its hood raised, moving rapidly down the middle of the road. My first instinct was to look for the mother who was presumably chasing after it, but there was no one on the road, leaving me worried that the pram and its presumed occupant would crash into the curb at the end of the road, causing a nasty injury. However, as the pram reached the end of the road, it quite smoothly turned the corner and carried on out of sight.

This ludicrous and surreal event left us strangely unnerved and played on our minds for some time. What now seems odd, aside from the obvious, is that no one else on the football pitch appeared to have seen it. Secondly, the tattered nature of the pram makes me think that it was a vintage one and unlikely to be in use in about 1994. Lastly, it was the stillness of the street that gave the whole incident an eerie feeling since, as I said, no one was around on the street to have either pushed or chased after it.

My friend and I have had irregular contact in subsequent years, but each time we meet the story is mentioned by one of us just as a way of validating that we did see this and that one of us hasn't made it up. I did think for a while that it might have been a prank, a remote-control pram as it were, but this seems as

fantastical as something paranormal. I mean, why go to so much trouble to rig a pram with a remote control only to try it out on a quiet road with only schoolchildren to act as gullible rubes? I would love to hear of any other “paranormal pram” stories if they're out there!

**Michael Byrne**

*London, 2011*

## MARKING TIME

Back in 1985, a business I was running was in a very bad way financially. I managed to conceal my problems from my parents, being determined to battle through on my own and not cause them concern.

My mother called me one Sunday morning, offering me some cash totally out of the blue. I declined the offer, but she said “I want to give it to you before I die,” which was a very strange statement to come from my perfectly healthy mother. I went to my parents' home that afternoon to find my mother reminiscing over the “old days”, which was another strange shift in her outlook. I left the house at 2.30pm and precisely an hour later, my mother rose from her chair, collapsed and died from a heart attack. At the inquest, it was declared that she had been perfectly fit, with no evidence of any previous heart trouble.

After the funeral 10 days later, I went back to my parents' house for the wake. On the mantelpiece sat a carriage clock driven by four revolving bearings. I remember that as a young lad of four I had been mesmerised by

the to-and-fro action of the clock's mechanism. It had never broken down or stopped in the 40 years that it had been on the mantelpiece – until the day of the funeral. It stopped at 3.30pm, the time of the funeral and the exact time my mother had died.

It remained stuck at 3.30 for five years until one afternoon, sitting with my father, I noticed that it was now showing 10.30. I mentioned this to my father who said that he'd cleaned it that morning and must have freed the jammed mechanism. However, it moved no more. The next morning, my father went shopping, fell down and died from a heart attack at 10.30am. The clock now sits in my house and has never moved since that time.

**CN Satterthwaite**

*Sollhull, West Midlands, 1997*

## TEDDY BOY TIME-SLIP

Back in 1979, when I was about 10 years old, my parents took my sister and me for a day trip to the Essex countryside. On the way home we passed through a small village. My dad drove down a one-way street and came to a T-junction, which was obstructed by a large, American car. It was a hideous ‘psychedelic’ purplish colour (almost like the rainbow effect you see on the back of a CD) but obviously well looked after, judging by the acres of highly polished chrome. I have never seen a car with such an unusual paint job, before or since.

The driver, a middle-aged man with the most absurd boot-polish black DA haircut and his partner, with an equally out-of-place

beehive hairdo, were standing outside the car. He was wearing a yellow ‘teddy boy’ outfit and she a 1950s-style skirt and blouse. They had spread a tablecloth over the roof of their vehicle and had assembled a pretty large picnic on it. I remember plates and plates of exotic-looking food – much, much more than you would imagine for just two people, not just cheese and pickle sarnies – and a bottle of champagne in a cooler. These guys were just eating their dinner in the middle of the road without a care in the world.

There were parked cars down both sides of the street and this car was blocking the whole road. There was no way around them. My dad leant out the window and asked them what they thought they were doing. The guy responded that his car had broken down and that “we have called in the army”, which struck us all as a bit odd and was probably why my dad left it at that. So we backed the car up about 50 feet (15m) and turned into another road. We were passing the intersection less than 30 seconds later, fully expecting to see the



car and its owners enjoying their picnic – but car, picnic and owners had completely disappeared.

Even if their car had been working properly, I fail to see how they could have packed up their massive picnic and driven off in the very short period of time it took for us to take our detour. My dad was incredulous and for a moment we thought we had come out on a different road, but we recognised the antique and bike shops on the corner. We drove around for a bit but couldn't see any sign of the car or its strange occupants. It's a mystery that has puzzled us to this day.

*Anonymous*

*Fortean Times Message Board, 2004*

## THE GUARDIANS OF THE CHURCHYARD

It was a sunny morning in the Summer of 1994 when my wife and I and our old friend Tony were visiting St Anne's Church, Limehouse. We had become intrigued by the architecture of Nicholas Hawksmoor on account of its occult significance, and were 'collecting' his churches one by one. Even before entering the churchyard, Tony and I noted striding towards us along the pavement around the perimeter of the Church, a malevolent scowl on his face, a male dwarf dressed in black, who in the light of what unfolded later impressed us retrospectively as being a 'Guardian' of the place. Once inside the churchyard, we were especially fascinated by the Masonic symbolism of the tombstones and were wondering around reading the inscriptions when a strange sight met our eyes, although as is often the case with out-of-the-commonplace occurrences, it all seemed perfectly natural at the time. Grouped around a large obelisk on what was obviously the resting place of a wealthy individual were three figures. One was a young girl of about nine or 10 with long blonde hair tied back with a ribbon; she was wearing a calf-length flowered dress, white socks and shoes, and was playing peek-a-boo around the obelisk with her two companions – a pair of what might best be described as 'old school' male tramps. One wore a hat and a long black coat, the other a dark coloured shirt, waistcoat and trousers. All three turned to regard us solemnly for a moment, then their game recommenced.

We all later commented on the strange stillness which had descended on the churchyard; although a busy main road was just beyond the wall, no cars could be heard and the birds were silent. It felt as if a moment in time was frozen. We continued to look at the grave-stones but when we glanced over to the tomb where the trio were playing there was no one to be seen; we were quite alone.

When we discussed the girl and her strange playmates we all felt that we had been in the presence of the Guardians of that place and that they were definitely from another time



## "A MALEVOLENT SCOWL ON HIS FACE... A DWARF DRESSED IN BLACK"

and/or parallel dimension to which they had returned in almost the blink of an eye.

*Guy Reid-Brown*

*Tunbridge Wells, Kent, 2012*

## THE MAN FROM THE SKY

In 1977, my family and I were living on a smallholding next to Beccles Common in Suffolk. One bright sunny morning in February or March, I heard my twin daughters, Wanda and Rosemarie, aged three-and-a-half, crying and calling me. They had been playing outside near the stable block. As I rushed out of the back porch door, one of the twins ran towards the house in a very disturbed state.

"Mummy, mummy, we've just seen a man jump from an aeroplane!"

"Where is he?"

"Walking up our drive."

By now her sister had reached me. Both were crying as I hustled them through the house. The other twin told the same story as her sister, adding that the man frightened her very much, and that he was tall with yellow hair. I washed their faces and when they had calmed down I questioned them again.

They couldn't give a satisfactory description of the "aeroplane", except to say that it was wide. It must have been very quiet; otherwise I would have heard it. Just then I heard the grating sound made by our side gate, when it is either being opened or shut. I ran out to investigate, but there was no one visible. I looked right round the house and even glanced in the cattle barns.

A few days later, we went shopping in town. I took the pushchair, as it was a long way for the twins to walk, so if they felt tired they could have a ride. On the way back, we came through the little iron gate leading from the Avenue and I glanced up the path to our house in the distance. It was unusually quiet, and there weren't even any golfers, though most mornings one or two were playing (part of the Common was used as a golf course). We crossed over the path leading to the golf house and started walking across the grass to join the track leading home.

When I looked up the path again, I saw a man about 800 yards (730m) away, behaving oddly. He flopped about, then straightened up and started walking towards us. I noticed what looked like a long streak of lightning in the sky above the point he had been falling about. This quickly disappeared and then I saw a little white circle, perfectly round, which moved very fast and was soon out of sight. The twins seemed full of energy and were running ahead, but as the strange man approached they turned tail, scampered back to me, and got into the pushchair. "That's the man in the aeroplane," they exclaimed.

He was over 6ft (1.8m) tall and dressed in blue-grey protective clothing, like a boiler suit, tight at the ankles and wrists, and apparently of a lightweight material, like nylon. His boots seemed to be made from the same material, and he had grey gauntlet gloves. He had earphones on and as we drew level I could hear a sound similar to white noise from an untuned radio. Then I heard quite a loud foreign voice coming through the static. The strangest feature of all was his pinky-red eyes. He was staring into the middle distance all the time and didn't look our way once. After he passed, I turned round for another look and noticed his magnificent shoulder-length hair, which shone a fantastic golden-red in the morning sunlight.

We had now reached the top end of the track, roughly the spot where I had seen the man falling about. To our right, a herd of cows appeared to be going berserk, running round and round the field in a most disturbed fashion. I looked back again and found that the man had vanished. There were only a few sparse bushes, so where had he gone? I turned the pushchair round and retraced our steps all the way down to the car park, but there was no sign of the man anywhere.

A few days later, the twins and I were collecting firewood on the Common. I glanced towards a golf green and saw what appeared to be a very small, dark grey caravan standing on two little legs. It was egg-shaped and had one wide window in the front, as far as I could tell. The land at that spot was very marshy, which would have made it extremely difficult to drive across, and I couldn't see any tracks. The twins caught up with me and pulled my arm saying, "There's the aeroplane, mum." I told them it was a caravan, but they insisted it was the aeroplane they had seen earlier. Surprisingly, they wanted to have a closer look, but I dissuaded them as it was very muddy where the "caravan" was standing. We came to a small wooded area and through the trees I saw a very tall man dressed in a similar fashion to the one we had seen a few days earlier. I couldn't see his face as he was turned away from us. Although it was a bright morning, it was rather dark among the trees and he was in shadow.

*Maureen Gaines  
Lowestoft, Suffolk, 2007*

## NO WIFE, NO FIRE

One day in the year 2000, I was alone in my New York apartment with my cat Polly when the telephone rang. An unfamiliar voice told me that "my wife" had just called to report that there was a "fire in my oven". I told the "doorman" that I had no wife and there was no fire in my oven. (Spookily, however, there *had* been a fire in my electric oven a week previously.)

Shortly after he hung up, there was a knock at my door. It was two white men in their thirties. They were in plain clothes and didn't offer any identification. They said they were from building security, even though I knew that all building security guards wear uniform. One of the men was very calm as he told me that "my wife" had called in to report a fire in my oven. I explained once again that I had no wife and no fire in my oven. The other man seemed to be in a violent rage and told the calm man that he was "going in", no matter what. His rage was very frightening.

Suddenly, Polly jumped up on a chair in plain view of the doorway. As soon as the calm one saw the cat, he grabbed the angry one by the shoulder and pulled him away. There was no question that seeing my cat had some sort of effect on the calm one. A few moments later, an authentic building security guard, with uniform and badge, appeared at my door, once again saying that "my wife" had called to report "the fire" in my oven. I denied both wife and fire, he shrugged his shoulders and left.

Who were these two men, one so relaxed, the other so furious? What was it about seeing the cat that

caused them to retreat so suddenly? Who was the woman pretending to be my wife?

*Ronald Rosenblatt  
New York, 2002*

## SPOOKY TOY MEGAPHONE

We lived for over 20 years in a house in suburban Melbourne. It was built in the mid 1950s and several families had lived there before us. There was always a peculiar vibe about the place; initially we put it down to the previous occupants. We'd met them once when we'd looked at the place while searching for a home to buy; after that, we always privately called them the Addams Family. When they'd moved out and before we moved in, we had to give the place a major clean. The previous owners had left the house in a filthy state – one bedroom in particular had streaks of blood across the walls.

As soon as we moved in, odd things would happen: small objects such as jewellery and keys would go missing, only to reappear sometime later in strange places, for example between the sheets at the foot of a bed, or between dinner plates in a cupboard. Occasionally my wife and kids would glimpse a little blonde-haired girl in different rooms and my wife would regularly feel someone stroke her hair as she lay in bed at night when there was no one actually there. These and other things that happened never made us uneasy; we thought of the presence as just part of the house. Although this story isn't really about the occurrences in the house, I think that somehow the vibe of the place played a part

in it.

Our youngest son had been given a voice-changing megaphone toy as a present at my office Christmas party. It had three or four voice settings; one of the voices that could be chosen to alter the speaker's was that of a child. Initially, the toy worked as it said on the box; but one day as I played with the kids an odd thing happened. As I spoke into the megaphone, my words were altered; not just my voice, but the words themselves. The sentence still made sense, but it plainly wasn't what I'd said. In addition, the 'child' voice had taken on a weird impish quality, taunting and sneering at the same time. The first time it happened I thought that maybe it was because I'd misheard the voice from the megaphone, or maybe the batteries were going flat and altering the sound being reproduced in some strange way.

I replaced the batteries and tried again. The voice was stranger when I tried it again, but only when the 'child' voice was selected. Each time something was said, more words would be changed, the 'child' voice becoming creepier and more demonic. I clearly recall my statement "I'm going to tickle you" being reproduced in the 'child' voice as "I'm going to suffocate you". I took the batteries out of the thing and put it well out of reach of the kids.

Sometime later, my brother-in-law and I were swapping spooky stories and I thought of the weird toy. He didn't believe what I told him, so I got the megaphone down from its hiding place and had him try it out for himself. The first few things he said were re-

produced in the 'child' voice just as he'd spoken them. Then the impish demon voice was back, twisting his words as it'd done to mine. But, not only did the words change, a horrible devilish giggle that made our skin crawl came from the megaphone. My brother-in-law looked at me with horror and dropped the megaphone as if it had sprung to life and had tried to bite him.

After that I took the batteries out of the thing again and put it up out of reach on top of a high wardrobe. I didn't think about it for years and when we moved out, the megaphone wasn't one of 'lost' things that always turn up when you move house.

I don't know what happened to it; my wife and kids don't know where it went either. I'd love to have it here now, in our new home. I'd love to try it again and see if the creepy little voice was just another aspect of the presence in the old house. It still gives me the creeps when I think about it, in particular that horrible little giggle that came from the thing the last time anyone touched it. Of the many peculiar things that we witnessed in that house and in another we lived in for a short time, the megaphone



was the only one that seemed sinister. The rest of the experiences appeared to be benign, even playful at times. The 'child' voice from the megaphone was neither benign nor playful.

**Gary Smith**

Victoria, Australia, 2012

## BEWARE THE HANTU! AWAS PONTIANAK!

I recently spent 16 months living and working in Malaysia, where I was given a spacious, partially furnished flat in an apartment block for workers of my government employer. The flat overlooked a large grassy field and a neat bank of palm and banana trees. I was told by one of my neighbours that the land on which the houses had been built had once been the gruesome location where civilian prisoners had been executed during the Japanese occupation in WWII.

At night this area was silent and unlit – the perfect atmosphere for hearing and seeing what we might otherwise miss in a loud, bright and busy environment. I had no distractions – no loud music, no TV, no noisy neighbours or traffic outside. My senses therefore picked up on any eerie sound or unexpected movement.

However, I think what made this housing block a ghost hunter's paradise was that the entire top floor was uninhabited and had effectively been sealed off for years. The previous occupants, before moving out, had apparently complained about their repeated encounters with *Hantus* – mischievous spirits that shift furniture around and hide valuable items such as wallets and purses for days on end. I myself was a victim of the *Hantu* infestation in the building as I would often wake in the morning to find things out of place, moved or missing. I was always annoyed when the *Hantu* would hide the front door keys.

Sometimes a chair or another item would be placed in a part of the house where I would never have placed it myself. I was especially uncomfortable with the sudden appearance of a chicken bone on the floor beside my bed one morning. I tried to reason away its presence, and I assumed that it had fallen off a dinner plate and had somehow been kicked into the bedroom, unnoticed and previously unseen. This theory was shattered when the bone moved to the top of my bedside cabinet while I was taking a shower.

When I questioned my neighbours, they all had a similar story to tell about things that go bump in the night. Indeed, Malaysia has to be one of the most superstitious countries on Earth, having a huge assortment of ghosts and demons to choose from in popular folklore. Despite the country being Islamic, religious



## “THERE WERE BAD SMELLS AND CHAIRS MOVING BY THEMSELVES”

leaders have not managed to completely dispel the ancient beliefs of the people, and stories of village, forest, graveside and animal ghosts remain. Belief in supernatural entities has also been reinforced by other ethnic minorities in Malaysia, such as the Chinese and Sri Lankan communities, who have brought their own occult practices and mythology to the country.

As the months passed, my apartment was visited by the *Hantu* on numerous occasions, all of which resulted in a generally unpleasant atmosphere. There were bad smells, extreme insect infestations, and the house itself was prone to being struck by lightning, one strike resulting in my computer being completely destroyed by a power surge. None of these things is remarkable in a tropical country – but how about chairs moving by themselves?

One quiet evening, as I stood on my balcony getting a breath of fresh air, I happened to glance back into my living room, through the glass patio doors. What I saw made me freeze with sudden shock. The wooden chair

on which I had just been sitting was now rocking gently as if I were still sitting on it (I have a habit of rocking a chair on only its two back legs). The movement only lasted a moment, but it was unmistakable – the chair had been in an unexplained state of motion.

The vista from my balcony also awarded me a site – this time of a *Pontianak*, a banshee-like relative of the *Langsuir*, or female vampire. Traditionally, the *Pontianak* manifests as a woman dressed in a green or white robe, and is said to be the tortured soul of a woman who died in childbirth. The malevolent vampire is thus said to enact its revenge on young men and pregnant women. Malaysians are very fond of *Pontianak* horror movies, but hardly any of them would ever believe someone who said they actually saw a *Pontianak*.

But that is indeed what I believe happened to me. On the night in question I was reasonably alert and reminiscing about all the things I had done and seen in Malaysia. I was listening to the sounds of the night and trying to work out just what plant or flower was causing the unusually sweet fragrance in the atmosphere. As I stood on my balcony watching small bats chasing moths around the building, I was suddenly alerted to a very large creature

flying up to the top branches of a palm tree directly in front of me. It was very big – far bigger than a bird or monkey. It seemed to be human-like, to have four limbs, a head and a long body. I also heard it screech like an angry eagle.

It was too dark to get a good look at the creature. I was tired and not wearing my glasses. So yes, I admit it could have been a local animal or giant bird that I wasn't familiar with. However, from the pictures and horror films that I've seen which portray the *Pontianak*, there was a striking resemblance.

Why didn't I grab a camera and get some photographic proof of the event? Why didn't I run outside and try to grab the monster before it flew away? Why didn't I shout wildly in the hope of attracting the attention of other people who could act as witnesses? The simple answer is that it all happened so fast that I didn't get a chance to do anything other than question what I was seeing in total amazement. I mean, what would your reaction be to a flying female vampire directly outside your window?

After seeing the *Pontianak*, the last few months in Malaysia became rather trying to say the least. I became ill and fatigued all the time. I lost weight and I often awoke from a restless sleep with unexplained bruising and scratches on my arms and neck. Logically, rather than being the result of a *Pontianak*'s nightly attacks, perhaps the bruising and illness were more likely caused by my constant battle with mosquitoes. Perhaps I was hitting

the insects so hard when they landed on my body that I was inflicting those weird injuries upon myself. But I cannot explain the final two encounters, which I suppose convinced me that I was not imagining the presence of either the *Pontianak* or *Hantu* ghost in my house.

About one month before I was due to leave Malaysia, I was in the kitchen making a cup of tea after a hard day's work. I was tired and completely off guard. As I opened the fridge to get some milk, something tapped my shoulder and let out a blood-curdling scream right behind me. It wasn't loud, but it sounded as if it was played backwards; as if someone had recorded the scream and then rewound the cassette tape. Not a pleasant noise to hear I can assure you. Of course, when I spun around, expecting to be confronted by a fang-toothed demon or the dead girl from the Japanese movie *Ringu*, I found nothing. Simply the dried-out floor mop leaning against the kitchen wall, and a bundle of small rubbish bags attracting a convoy of red ants.

The final encounter came only a week before I left the country. I was in the living room, busily typing away on my computer, sending emails to family and friends far away. There was a bad smell in the house, but I didn't think much about it, as there were often unpleasant aromas in the building, caused by blocked storm drains and sewage overflows.

I was leaning over my computer when a black shape filled my peripheral vision. It was the size and shape of a person – the shape of someone standing directly beside me. I jumped up from my seat and adopted a martial art stance that I had learned in my youth. All common sense and reason had now disappeared – as had the black spectre! I shouted at the walls of my empty house. I shouted and swore at all the *Hantus* and *Pontianaks* of Malaysia. I was fuming with anger and shaking with fear. I had not imagined the black ghost beside me – the vision was far too real. Something nasty had stood right next to me, but had vanished in the blink of an eye.

I got no sleep that night, and told everyone in work about it the next day. My colleagues sympathised with me and told me various ways to banish *Hantus* – salt in the corners of the room, candles around the bed, lucky charms, prayers and spells. But I don't think anyone really believed my story. I didn't care about that; I only cared about leaving that haunted apartment and getting a good night's sleep – something I hadn't been granted for most of my ghost-tortured stay in Malaysia.

As a rational person, I could put all the hauntings down to sleep deprivation, mosquitoes, insecticide, too much coffee, overwork and being 10,000 miles from home. But another part of me truly believes that I actually saw a *Hantu*, or a *Pontianak*, or both.

I made a sign for the front door of the apartment on the day of my leaving. I just wanted to alert the next tenant that all may not be well, and that caution should be taken when dismissing stories of ghosts in the building. "Beware the *Hantu*! *Awas Pontianak*!"

**Devlin Ferris**

*By email, 2011*

## THROUGH THE DOOR

In 1958 I was enjoying my annual summer holiday with a handful of other children on a vast Kenyan cattle farm at Machakos, 40 miles (64km) from Nairobi, owned by a young English family. The eldest at 12, I had my own room, unlike the others who shared "dormitories". It was a small dressing room reached via the bathroom. The door between the bathroom and dressing room was the only way in and out, and the single window to the dressing room was heavily barred to prevent intruders. The farmhouse formed a large U-shaped bungalow around a central lawned courtyard. At that time there was no electricity on the farm, and lighting was by kerosene lamps.

One evening we sat playing cards and telling ghost stories to frighten each other and ourselves, which we did. I went to bed slightly jumpy, but after locking myself into the dressing room with the heavy 6in (15cm) long key, I soon fell asleep.

I awoke suddenly to see at the foot of the bed a figure, about 8ft (2.4m) tall, apparently draped in a beige sheet. It slowly and silently raised its arms upwards from its sides, and in terror I leapt up and rushed from the room, yelling, my heart beating so hard and fast that it felt it would burst. As I raced across the courtyard, some adults charged out, the men with guns, the women shouting excitedly.

Breathlessly I explained that there was a huge ghost in my room. This caused great amusement, and I was shepherded into the house, filled with cocoa and biscuits and a little tot of brandy, and assured that I'd had a nightmare. About an hour later I had calmed down sufficiently and two of the women took me back to my room. The dressing room door was locked.

"Where's the key?" they asked.

"I haven't got it," I replied.

"Well you must have, because the door is locked."

"I didn't come out of that door," I answered, "I went through the other one."

"There isn't another door. You must have come through this one. Now what have you done with the key? Do you think you dropped it?"

I kept explaining that I hadn't stopped to unlock the door, and had run through the other door, but of course I knew there wasn't another door. By the light of the kerosene lamp we searched high and low in the courtyard for the missing key, without success. The men were summoned, and using a piece of metal found the key still in the lock, inside the dressing room. It was carefully pushed out through the keyhole onto a sheet of cardboard and retrieved through the gap beneath the door.

We stood staring at the key, the adults amused and impressed by what they thought was a clever trick. I continued insisting that I had not come through the door, and soon their amusement turned to irritation. I couldn't have climbed through the window, because it was barred.

As we could all quite clearly see, the place

where I said I had run from the room was occupied by a large wardrobe standing in front of a thick stone wall. For several days the event was discussed with equal measures of amusement and irritation, as there was no rational explanation, and eventually the subject was dropped and faded. I have never since had any similar experience.

**Susie Hiscock**

*St Romain en Charroux, France, 1997*

## BALD MAN MYSTERY

In my mid-20s I worked in the maintenance department of a factory and we had an electric clock system operated from one central clock in the reception area. One day all the clocks in the factory stopped at 12.10pm. My supervisor tried in vain to restart the main clock. At this point – and I really can't explain this – I knew I had to see my girlfriend. She lived in a small village a good 10 miles (16km) away from the factory and I couldn't drive back then. Somehow, I managed to convince my boss that I had to leave work straight away, but assured him I would make the time up the following day. I walked to the outskirts of town and then took a country road leading to where my girlfriend lived.

A short distance along the road, a car pulled over and the driver asked if I needed a lift. Perhaps he knew the buses weren't very regular at this time of day, or maybe he was just a Good Samaritan. The journey didn't take very long and he soon dropped me at the flat my girlfriend was renting. I knocked on her front door several times and when she finally opened it she seemed confused, and had a nasty red burn on her left forearm. I asked if she was OK, but she just stumbled back into the living room and collapsed on the sofa.

After a short while, she'd recovered sufficiently to tell me that she'd been ironing in the living room when she had an eerie sensation that someone was in the flat with her. At that point, she accidentally caught her arm with the iron and fell back in shock. That's when she saw an overweight, bald, middle-aged man, sitting in the corner of the room staring at her. Within seconds he disappeared. I reassured her it was probably caused by the shock of the burn. I stayed with her that night, but I didn't dare mention to her that the man who gave me the lift was overweight, bald, and middle-aged. Of course, it could have been sheer coincidence that the descriptions matched, but what I couldn't explain was that, other than asking if I wanted a lift, there was no conversation between us during the journey. Then I realised that I hadn't even told him where to drop me off. He already knew.

**Mark Braybrook,**  
*Hampshire, 2013*

*We'd like to express our thanks to all the authors of these weird and wonderful witness accounts. If you have a strange story to tell, please send it to [sieveking@forteantimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com) or by post to Fortean Times, PO Box 66598, London N11 9EN.*

# CONNECTED

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FORTEAN TIMES MESSAGE BOARD

**STU NEVILLE** looks back at FT's online forum and how a modest corner of the magazine's website gave birth to a community that – despite technical challenges, public spats and publisher indifference – continues to thrive on the eve of its 20th anniversary.

Throughout the 1990s, the *Fortean Times* was riding high. General interest in fortean subjects was still extensive, thanks largely to the success of *The X-Files*, and there was a sudden proliferation of fledgeling digital offerings. Fortean itself was on the cusp; by the end of the decade, interest in UFOs was dying away and ghosts were coming into vogue once again (*Most Haunted* would debut in May 2002) and the world was well-disposed toward the weird. In 2001, the *Fortean Times* itself was on a cusp of its own: it parted company with John Brown Publishing and joined the IFG (I Feel Good) stable, and around this time it was decided that it should have its own website to mirror the magazine's content. This had subscription info, copies of articles, a whole section devoted to It Happened to Me (the pick of which made print in the mag itself) and in a small, un-regarded corner, its own message board.

This was still a relatively novel concept. There had long been bulletin boards, squawking over dial-up modems, but they generally had a sparse, tree-like structure (still echoed in Reddit), and half the fun was trying to work out where on Earth the hugely meaningful and insightful gem you'd just posted had gone. The Fortean Times Message Board, however, was powered by vBulletin, had a natty spider motif running through it (the Internet was still "the web" to many in those oh-so distant days) and a clear group of broad categories. Administered by Alistair Strachan and Mark Pilkington, its membership soon

### The very first thread, in 2001, was "The Loch Ness Monster"

numbered in the high 10s, with everyone eager to start populating the separate forum sections, each of which was a large, echoing empty warehouse awaiting material. Perhaps unsurprisingly many of the classic cases had an early showing: the very first thread (at least the first still in existence), from 29 June 2001 was The Loch Ness Monster. Who started this one is sadly, if somewhat appropriately, a mystery for reasons I will go into later.

There was a palpable excitement, as people with often as not a lifetime of relatively solitary interest in our corner of the world could suddenly speak with others who shared the same enthusiasm and curiosity: many early threads, tonally, consist of "Ooh! What about X?" with equally excited conversations following. In addition, having found like-minded people (apparently in some cases for the first time ever) the Chat section absolutely blossomed. We had a community on our hands. What was clear from the beginning though – incredibly rare even then among discussion groups – was a baseline of courtesy and tolerance. The vast majority of the early

adopters were *FT*-readers or subscribers who perhaps instinctively understood the kind of balance and respect for alternative viewpoints that we've sought to maintain ever since. All baselines have exceptions though, and trolls appeared quite early on, enlivening threads with their helpful comments, occasionally posting people's home addresses, taking well-intentioned threads where people posted their own pics and photoshopping them into porn scenes, and indulging in other forms of light-hearted merriment. This prompted the Powers That Be to ask for moderators, and they were duly recruited, given a badge and a cutlass and pointed in roughly the right direction – one of them was me. Reaction to this was splendidly fortean. A mixture of welcome, sarcasm, prophecies of doom and outrage. We got the trolls sorted, and then moved our attention to a bigger problem: The Great Midnight Collapse.

Every night, at the stroke of 12, the board would become unusable. The problem was that the software just wasn't designed to cope with the degree of use: at times we'd have as many as 700 users simultaneously using the board, and given the exponential rate at which content was growing, especially in Chat, when the software attempted to index the database (set for midnight GMT) it would faint. We attempted remedial measures. The most obvious, and most controversial was the decision to prune Chat. At that point, Chat held over 50 per cent of the threads on the board, some with over 1,000 replies, others with one or fewer, from virtual pubs with a

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**Fortean Times Message Board**

View Today's Active Threads

Welcome to the Fortean Times Message Board.  
If this is your first visit, be sure to check out the [FAQ](#) by clicking the link above. You may have to [register](#) before you can post: click the register link above to proceed. To start viewing messages, select the forum that you want to visit from the selection below.

Registered Members: 1296  
Total Threads: 1983 | Total Posts: 31659  
Welcome to our newest member, [Bueading](#)

The time now is 13:58  
You last visited: 04-02-2002 13:58

Forum	Posts	Threads	Last Post	Moderator
<b>It Happened to Me!</b> First hand accounts of High Strangeness <a href="#">itnm@forteanimes.com</a>	759	60	04-02-2002 13:20 by <a href="#">Ily lodestons</a>	
<b>General Fortean</b> General forteana	5598	297	04-02-2002 11:42 by <a href="#">Major Kraut</a>	
<b>Notes &amp; Queries</b> Your fortean questions answered	3186	209	04-02-2002 13:50 by <a href="#">estab</a>	
<b>News stories</b> Discuss current news stories. First poster - please include the story text in your posting.	1929	160	04-02-2002 13:08 by <a href="#">Red Dales</a>	
<b>Parapsychology</b> Psychical research discussions	553	36	31-01-2002 05:02 by <a href="#">RECKY2002</a>	
<b>Ufology</b> Watch the skies!	735	80	03-02-2002 16:21 by <a href="#">harlequin</a>	
<b>Urban Legends &amp; Folklore</b> Urban legends and folklore	1855	85	04-02-2002 12:04 by <a href="#">Sunny Mallard</a>	

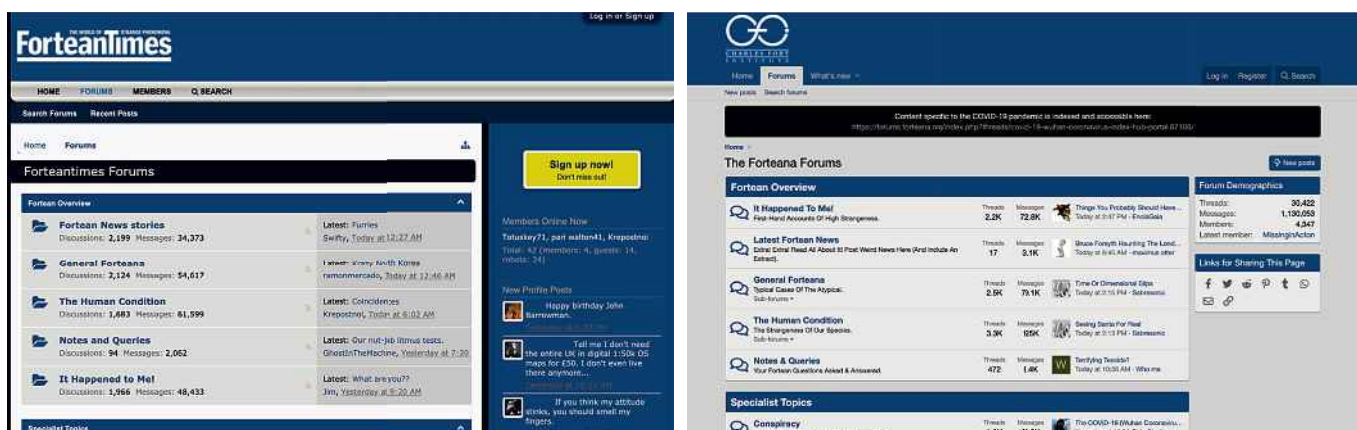
**Forums**

[FAQ](#) [Search](#) [Memberlist](#) [Usergroups](#) [Profile](#) [Log in to check your private messages](#)

The time now is 09-11-2008 07:24  
Fortean Times Message Board Forum Index

View unanswered post

Forum	Topics	Posts	Last Post
<b>Fortean Overview</b>			
<b>Fortean News stories</b> Discuss current Fort-related news stories. First poster - please include the story text in your posting.	1845	27016	08-11-2008 22:42 <a href="#">Penny</a>
<b>General Fortean</b> General forteana	1690	38853	09-11-2008 04:59 <a href="#">TRUE THOMAS</a>
<b>The Human Condition</b> The strangeness of our species: From madness to medical oddities and beyond, far beyond...	1221	32814	09-11-2008 02:42 <a href="#">Richdee</a>
<b>It Happened to Me!</b> First hand accounts of High Strangeness	1402	29362	08-11-2008 12:38 <a href="#">AnnelAfrica</a>
<b>Specialist Topics</b>			
<b>Conspiracy</b> Secret history, parapolitics, suppressed science. The news THEY don't want you to know!	1266	45490	07-11-2008 16:34 <a href="#">technoskeptic</a>
<b>Forteanology</b>			05-11-2008 03:03



**FACING PAGE:** The first iteration of the FTMB in 2002 (left) and 2008. **ABOVE:** The forum in 2016 and in its current incarnation on the Charles Fort Institute site.

massive and rowdily-good-natured clientele – karaoke a highlight – responding to requests for opinions about supermarket own-brand rhubarb yoghurt. We set the system’s in-built auto-prune (not another yoghurt flavour) to cull anything that hadn’t had a reply in three months.

The effect was severe. Not on the system; while it still slowed to a crawl at midnight, there was no more complete, three-hour outage. No – the effect was on some of the membership. While most accepted the loss of so many threads as necessary, and recognised that Chat content was, and still is, secondary in importance to the rest of the board, some were very attached to the posts they’d produced and conversations in which they’d participated, and there was real anger among some, which hardened into antipathy. In addition, a board upgrade accidentally erased a large number of member details – hence the deletion of long-dormant posters and why whoever it was that started the “Loch Ness Monster” thread is now shown simply as “anonymous” – as well as banning users and forcing people to re-register. Moderators became resented by some, which often spilled over into arguments and accusations, and for a while there was real turmoil, with a high turnover of mods. We dealt with it as best as we could: in retrospect, there are other routes we could – and would – have taken, but at the time we were trying to keep the community together. Many big posters nonetheless left – which is a pity, as it would have been good to see what they could have contributed in the years since. Indeed, the door remains open and they will always be welcomed back.

We rebuilt. By the late noughties our membership had burgeoned to several thousand: the fashion for paranormally themed TV had attracted many newcomers, along with our hardcore of long-term and original posters. The content had burgeoned, too – so much so that sub-division of the original broad categories became necessary, a process greeted, as we’d come to expect, with a mixture of enthusiasm and outrage. We still had problems with software, and as part of an overall reorganisation of the publisher’s sites the forum was given a separate identity from

the main site, and with it another upgrade, this time to XenForo software, which was far more cooperative than previous iterations. With this, we could refine our subdivisions.

I’ll take this opportunity to explain why this was necessary. The board had changed from what it was when it started, and change is part of the reason for its longevity. Most other message boards dealing with our sort of content have long since gone: while we were among the first, we have figuratively ridden the waves rather than going against them, or indeed trying to hold them back. When we started, many saw the FTMB’s immediate charm as being like that of a rambling back-street antiquarian bookshop where like minds could meet: there are vestiges of this, and we have tried very hard to preserve it, but for a long time we’ve been aware that the board is often used as a resource for research and discussion. Whereas the early iterations played heavily into the forteam flaneur instinct, there were many, many threads started on topics that had in fact been under discussion for years (our legendarily inconsistent “search” function has helped no end in that respect.) The subdivision helps those who are new, or who want to pick our collective brains to see what we already know, and often as not to add their own thoughts. So while many of us, me included, do miss the ramble, we now rarely get new threads started on old topics but instead find old favourites suddenly bumped and re-invigorated. It remains a pleasure to go to the end of a forum and find new old material, and even people who know the content backwards will always find something previously overlooked, or conversations long-forgotten.

We ambled along nicely – peace reigned. We had a stable, well-liked and hugely capable moderation team and a board that, the odd domestic aside, rubbed along well. We briefly played host when the Alien Hub message board abruptly closed in spring 2017, and many of its members rallied on the FTMB as a safe haven while they made arrangements to resettle elsewhere – we had 200 new members for a few weeks, before they moved on (though one or two still visit.) Then, in the late summer of 2018, came a shock.

Following another reorganisation at the publisher level, and a drawing-in to core business, the forum was to be closed. What happened next was – and I was in the middle of it – frankly dazzling. Suddenly offers of help and hosting came from multiple angles, members started compiling memberlists and emailing, helping us contact dormant posters, providing a rallying point on Facebook if the board did suddenly vanish. We received dozens of offers of help: the very vitality we’d seen in the early days came rushing back as we all found a common purpose once more. On the back of this rush of goodwill and generosity, we found a home as fitting as the one originally created and hosted by *Fortean Times* – at the Charles Fort Institute, where now we continue to flourish as The Forteana Forums. I have to give absolute and heartfelt thanks to those without whom this would have been impossible: Gordon Rutter, Dean Valentine, Yithian, Enola Gaia and Frideswide, and of course to David Sutton for helping negotiate our stay of execution long enough for us to make our new home with the CFI.

As we tip over into our 20th year, the forum remains as vibrant as it ever was. Here’s to the people who have made it happen: the kind publishers, the kinder benefactors, the team past and present, all of whom have gone above and beyond and without whom it would have been impossible to sustain (believe me, this I know) and above all, to the members who make the Forteana Forums the unique place it is. Like all communities, its fortunes have waxed and waned, there have been friendships and adversities, marriages and divorces, we’ve celebrated births and mourned deaths, welcomed newcomers and left a light – still blinking – for the missing in action and lost at sea. There have been awful losses and priceless gains, but the spirit of pure curiosity is as strong as it was in those first days, as befits a child of *Fortean Times*. Here’s to the next 20 years!

♦ **STU NEVILLE** is a lifelong forteam, an administrator of the FTMB since 2002 and an avid pursuer of the peculiar. When not embroiled in the weird he works for a training company.

# LORDS OF MISRULE

Christmases past saw the unleashing of chaotic forces and the overthrow of the accepted social order as the world was turned upside down by the Lord of Misrule and his retinue of fools. **THERESE TAYLOR** asks if it's time to resurrect this particular Yuletide tradition...

Christmas, in past times, included adult entertainment and also the celebration of dark themes such as death and retribution. The death of the old year, and the turning point of the Winter Solstice, was a time to affirm the contrast of light and darkness.

Dark Christmas figures such as Black Peter (FT309:34-39) and Krampus (FT348-26-33), fell out of favour in 20th-century culture, and even Santa Claus lost his solemn aura of holy intercession. Recent years, though, have seen these ghoulish characters of Yuletide making something of a return. Perhaps the Lord of Misrule, too, might recover his surreal presence in public celebrations. His clowning and satirical disrespect for authority would certainly offer a welcome change in mood.

In mediæval Europe, the Lord of Misrule was a Christmas celebrant who was either elected by his peers or appointed by the authorities to lead chaotic displays of the reversal of authority. He was sometimes called the 'Christmas Lord' or the 'Abbot of Misrule', and reigned for the season between Christmas Eve and Twelfth Night.

As a time of carnival, Christmas was a moment when the subordinate lower orders could temporarily mock their betters and enjoy feasting and carousing. Similar feasts were held at midsummer, where a Harvest Lord or a Lord of Summer would sometimes preside.

As king of his season, the Lord of Misrule wore a costume that usually contradicted sacred or noble emblems. He had such parodies as a crown of tin, an abbot's robe of scarlet, or a woman's dress combined with male garments. He would issue orders which had to be obeyed, in the spirit of the feast. He led his followers into parades of drinking and dancing and mockeries of decorum. The faults of the powerful and respected could be denounced with impunity by the Lord of Misrule.

The chaotic nature of such carnival displays was tolerated less and less from the 12th century onwards. But, despite the disapproval, the Lord of Misrule and his attendants broke out into revelry again and again. It was a difficult tradition to repress. The kingdom of the Lord of Misrule manifested itself in popular culture well into the industrial era of the 19th century.

## AMONG RULERS

In Tudor England, the Lord of Misrule came to the fore during the reign of the boy king,



LEFT: The court of Edward VI saw royal validation of the Lord of Misrule. FACING PAGE: The Frolic of the Lord of Misrule in an illustration from 1901.

## THE LOWER ORDERS COULD MOCK THEIR BETTERS AND ENJOY FEASTING & CAROUSING

Edward VI. This is surprising, given that Edward was educated in an austere form of the Protestant tradition, which was specifically critical of carnivals. However, during the three years of his reign, as noted by historian Sydney Anglo: "The Lord of Misrule – who had been a regular though minor figure in earlier Christmas shows – came briefly to the fore, and dominated court entertainments with his peculiar and macabre buffoonery."

In October 1551 the court of Edward VI had an upheaval, as his uncle, the Duke of Somerset, was arrested by political rivals, replaced as Lord Protector, and executed. This caused some popular discontent, and according to a chronicler, in order to take "talk out of mens' mouths, and also to recreate and refresh

the troubled spirits of the young King, it was devised that the feast of Christ's Nativity, commonly called Christmas, which was then at hand, should be solemnly kept at Greenwich with open household... there is always one appointed to make sport in the Court, called commonly Lord of Misrule, whose office is not unknown to such as have been brought up in Noblemen's houses, and among the keepers of great houses, which use liberal feasting in that season."

The Lord of Misrule at the court of Edward VI was George Ferrers, an educated gentleman and therefore not from the ranks of actors and jesters who commonly entertained the nobility. His displays included references to Greek and Latin mythologies. There were also more traditional Lord of Misrule activities such as processions with music, the giving of pardons and mock executions of authority figures. Significant resources were put into these entertainments, which cost hundreds of pounds – a huge sum at that time.

However, the winter of 1537 was to be the date of the last appearance of the Lord of Misrule among England's sovereigns. Mary Tudor and Elizabeth I did not continue the tradition, possibly because as Queens they would not enjoy a spectacle of male authority, even in jest. As Elizabeth I said: "I will have here but one mistress and no master." Elizabeth did not have the Lord of Misrule, but she participated in lavish Twelve Days of Christmas festivities, and two plays by Shakespeare – *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night* – make apparent reference to the Royal Court, and to dazzling, comic and liminal figures who throw reason to the winds and enjoy the powers of misrule.

## DISAPPROVAL AND DEFENDERS

The Lord of Misrule came under an official ban from the 1540s. The reformation of religion, the spread of education and greater social controls, all put carnival behaviour under restraint. Many traditions continued, though, and as late as the 19th century further efforts were required in industrialising nations to prevent workers from extending Christian feast days into a week of leisure and buffoonery.





ABOVE: Christmas revels at Haddon Hall, Derbyshire. BELOW: The spirit of misrule, invoked by the grinning masks in the corners, is seen on these mediaeval floor tiles from the Black Friary in Derby; the reversal of the normal order is shown by a triumphant hare blowing a horn and mounted on a hunting dog.

In 1631, English writer John Taylor published the *Complaint of Christmas*, and reproached the ruling class, who were no longer willing to offer general hospitality: "In this Hall have I seen strewed with rushes, a sign of the soft and kind entertainment the guests should have. I have seen a Lord of Misrule, that with his honest mirth hath made old Christmas laugh."

In 1583, the Puritan writer Phillip Stubbs had given a scathing description of Misrule festivities in *The Anatomie of Abuses*: "First, all the wild heads of the parish, conventing together, choose them a Grand Captain (of all mischief) whom they ennoble with the title of Lord of Misrule, and him they crown with great solemnity and adopt for their king... Then every one of these his men he investeth with his liveries of green, yellow or some other light wanton colour; and as though they were not (bawdy) gaudy enough I should say... then have they their hobby horses, dragons and other antics, together with their bawdy pipers and thundering drummers to strike up the devil's dance withal. Then march these heathen company towards the church and churchyard, their pipers piping, their drummers thundering, their stumps dancing, their bells jingling, their handkerchiefs swinging about their heads like madmen, their hobby-horses and other monsters skirmishing amongst the throng. And in this sort they go to the church... dancing and swinging their handkerchiefs over their heads in the church like devils incarnate."

In the French town of Amiens, the same colours – green and yellow – were worn by the

Prince of Fools, who enlivened New Year's Day each year with a parade of excesses and breaking of rules. A 19th century French observer mildly suggested that: "The Feast of the Prince of Fools evidently has a moral aim, despite the follies and eccentricities of the said Prince. The disorder of this feast in effect teach people how one degrades oneself if one is abandoned without restraint to one's passions."

### IN CHURCHES

The clerical equivalent of the Lord of Misrule was the Boy Bishop, who in mediaeval chorister schools was elected Bishop either for the feast of St Nicolas or the feast of the Holy Innocents, both in December. This child was dressed in carefully made episcopal robes, and presided over all religious services except Mass. He was surrounded by the other children, and the bishops and clerics went in procession after him, carrying candles and missals, as if they were the students.

Ronald Hutton writes that: "At St Paul's the Boy Bishop was chosen by the senior clergy, and was expected to preach a sermon. Three of these have survived, all clearly written by adults but with a great deal of dry humour at the expense of authority."

The charming mediaeval custom of the Boy Bishop was abandoned during the Reformation. Since the 1980s, the custom has been revived in a few Cathedrals in England, Spain

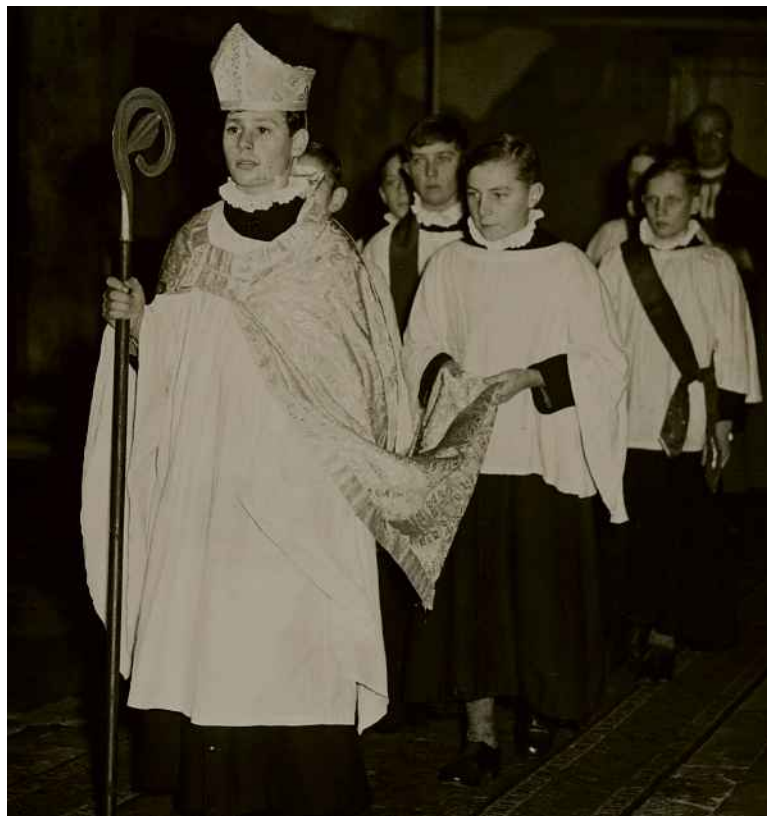
and the United States, and nowadays Girl Bishops sometimes appear as well. These ceremonies are rare, but seem to attract great attention and a sense of celebration among young people.

The mediaeval French version of these festivities was more burlesque in nature. During the Feast of Fools, at Christmas time, a choir boy or novice would be elected bishop and would sit in state while minor clergy made parody performances of the sacraments. An ass would be led around the church. These types of misrule celebrations were no longer allowed in the cathedrals by the late 15th century.

At the cathedral in Strasbourg, around 1490, the choristers would chant the verse from the Magnificat: "He hath cast down the mighty, and raised the lowly" on the eve of the mid-summer feast of St Jean. This was a preparation for going onto the streets, singing and dancing in the churches and convents, and "bringing trouble and disorder everywhere", according to Catholic preacher and reformer Jean Geiler de Kaysersberg.

Father Kaysersberg was not deceived by the singing of a verse from the Bible, and his biographer suggested that the "hideous scandals" of misrule at Strasbourg, which included midnight feasts within the cathedral itself, must be "the traces of the festivals which the pagans celebrated around their temples, and which





ABOVE LEFT: In the French Feast of Fools, an ass is led around the church. ABOVE RIGHT: The tradition of the Boy Bishop is celebrated in New Romney, Kent.

the Church tolerated in the first centuries of the Middle Ages.” It was no longer permitted after the 1500s.

### THE PRINCE OF FOOLS

In Italy and France, the Prince of Fools, or the Pope of Fools, were the continental versions of the Lord of Misrule. They took part in carnivals, and were sometimes supported by organised societies, ‘abbeys of misrule’, who maintained these archaic traditions in regional towns.

An obvious question about the Lord of Misrule is whether this figure is derived from the pagan *Saturnalia*, the end of year Roman festival of slaves when the masters served their underlings and the powerful were mocked. These rituals often ended with the sacrifice of the king of the festival.

The early folklorists saw a straight continuation between pagan beliefs and popular revels that echoed their forms in Christian communities. In his famous work *The Golden Bough*, James Frazer confidently equated the Christmas Lord with the males who were exulted then killed during the rites of Saturn, stating that “this grotesque personage is no other than a direct successor of the old King of the Saturnalia, the master of the revels, the real man who personated Saturn and, when the revels were over, suffered a real death in his assumed character. The King of the Bean on Twelfth Night and the mediæval Bishop of Fools, Abbot of Unreason, or Lord of Misrule are figures of the same sort.”

This interpretation of the Lord of Misrule is no longer accepted in mainstream academic

thinking. As Ronald Hutton writes of English festivals: “There is absolutely no evidence that the people who kept these customs were anything but Christian or had any notion that by carrying on these activities they were commemorating older deities. Furthermore... only a few folk rituals can be traced back beyond the Christian era with any certainty.”

In my view, the pagan element cannot be entirely dismissed. The role of the young male as a figure of dynamic fun, but also of poignant loss, is a continuation of the agenda of the fertility cults. As Natalie Zelmon Davis wrote of the French Abbeys of Misrule, they were based on youth groups – the bachelors of each town – and the young unmarried men had specific tasks which they alone could perform. “In the Fete des Brandons at the beginning of Lent, it was they who bore the brands of blazing straw and jumped and danced to ensure the village’s agricultural and sexual fertility for the coming year; on All Souls’ Day it was they who rang the bells for the dead ancestors’ village.”

### LEGACIES IN ARTWORK

There are numerous references to the Lord of Misrule in mediæval art. Pictures of animals hunting with bows, of dogs leading masters, and other such parodies, are often depictions of the followers of the Lord of Misrule. An understanding of this festival is therefore essential to a cultural appreciation of the heritage of the mediæval world.

Misrule is a concept which divides time and allocates some seasons as moments of licence. By departing from authority, people

get a respite from reality itself. We no longer celebrate in this way, but the vital energies of the Lord of Misrule might one day be revived in our Christmas feasts. People who tire of the mass-produced trivia and the artificial sweetness of our commercial Christmas season should consider forming societies of the Abbey of Misrule and electing a Lord. His rule might be no more irrational than that of his counterparts in real life.

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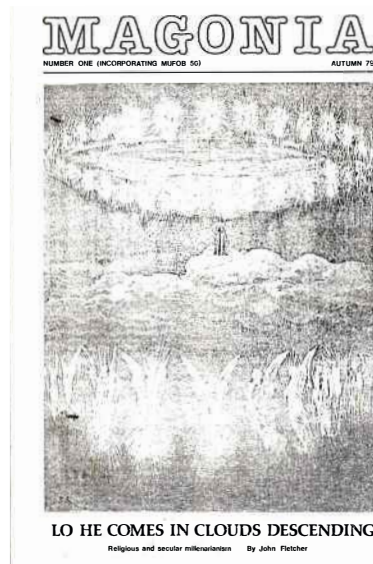
♦ **THERESE TAYLOR** is a scholar in the field of French religious history. She is the author of a biography, *Saint Bernadette of Lourdes, Her Life, Death and Visions* (Bloomsbury Press, 2008). She writes on folklore and cultural studies in publications including *Hellebore* and *Fortean Times*.

# THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

## NO 57. FORTY YEARS OF SHOVELLING IT

It wasn't just the Beatles, you know. On Merseyside in the 1960s another group of irreverent young men coalesced around an iconoclastic idea, and with rather more intellectual heft than the admittedly slightly better-known, and better-earning, mop-tops. (They also retained their sense of humour for longer than the fabled quartet.) We speak of *Magonia* magazine, which in one form or another ran for more than 40 years until 2009 (its exact date of birth "depends whether you date its origins with the *Merseyside UFO Group Newsletter* which started in 1965; with John Harney taking over its editorship and change to *Bulletin* in 1966; or with the founding of the original *Merseyside UFO Bulletin* in January 1968," noted Peter Rogerson in a retrospective in *Magonia* 99, the final print issue). Having started as a UFO sheet, its remit had expanded by the late 1970s to cover related folklore and social phenomena, and so *Magonia* proper, as it were, was born, with John Rimmer, who'd joined after the first couple of issues of *MUFOB*, taking over the editorial reins. It and its predecessors are all pretty much complete online, and you can start hunting through the history at [magoniamagazine.blogspot.com](http://magoniamagazine.blogspot.com). There's hardly anything there that's not worth reading, unless you're fatally allergic to the psychosocial hypothesis (PSH), and the spirit of the print edition lives on in the book reviews that continue to appear there.

If you *are* deeply allergic to the PSH, you could always start your trawl through the archives with Issue 72, which sported a massive article by one Anthony R Brown titled "The Decline and Fall of the Psychosocial Hypothesis". "A Denunciation" might be a better description, as Mr Brown lays into every aspect of the PSH he can think of – including some that you hadn't imagined, such as that "Hysteria represents the foundation stone upon which the whole Psychosocial model is built." Having started with a concept that by the end of the 20th century had largely been discarded by psychologists except as a handy label for some syndromes (e.g. 'hysterical blindness') he ends thus: "The essence of the Psychosocial Hypothesis is of cheapening the witness's puzzling experience, and questioning their basic honesty as a human being. The hypothesis and some of its supporters tells us more about their own character and their ignorance of even the most basic facts of science than it ever tells us of the true nature of the UFO or abduction. Time: that arbiter between truth, ignorance or mere interpretational propaganda, will reveal who, in the UFO world, will be remembered for their contributions to our subject." How "the most basic facts of science" justify Mr Brown's fondness



for the ETH and UFO abductions is never made clear, although he does make it apparent that he doesn't really understand the PSH, and in two ways.

In the first place, as we've said elsewhere, it's not a single overarching hypothesis – unlike, say, the 'rare Earth' proposal, which more or less wipes out the notion of alien visitation (there being no aliens to visit). The PSH is an *approach* to reported anomalies, whose first task

generally is to establish if there's a possible – even better, a plausible – explanation for a UFO encounter, poltergeist infestation, leprechaun visitation, or whatever. Failing that, and mostly on a case-by-case basis, it's as well to look round the corners of the individual claim and assess its context. This may mean picking apart claims of abduction by way of deconstructing the problems presented by hypnosis, or learning (revealing) more about the individual witness, or seeing how a particular story fits into a long-established narrative tradition, among other things. Behind this lurks the great shape of Occam's Razor.

Mr Brown's second failure is to think that the UFO problem, such as it is, has solely to do with science, and that Magonians presented themselves as taking a 'scientific' approach to it. They didn't: they had other fish to fry and other rows to hoe, as the whole content of the magazine shows. As does the remarkable range of contributors. If there was a common theme, its hallmark was the application of *logic* rather than 'science'. Not all agreed on where that logic led, which made for some fascinating – and sometimes amazingly long – exchanges. But none, so far as we know, ever suggested that weirdness *per se* might not be manifesting in the world. Yet it is surely intriguing that so many people in the world at large seem to *want* things to be weirder than they are, and on occasion to work quite hard to make them so. Which all by itself invites psychosocial commentary of some kind.

Now for the cherry-picking. With 40-plus years of material to survey, all of which as we've said is worth reading, some gems are bound to be overlooked, and everyone will have an opinion as to which they are. But, deep breath, these are the ones that have struck us as outstanding.

The pieces of which the *Magonia* editors are probably most proud are those, often written by the late Roger Sandell, deconstructing claims of ritual satanic abuse (RSA). The first batch of these, by Roger, Peter Rogerson and Michael Goss, appeared in *Magonia* 38 in January 1991 – pipping *Fortean Times's* own thoroughgoing demolition (FT57:46-62) by a couple of months. Roger Sandell returned to the subject several times before his untimely death in 1996. These first articles present

social commentary – Peter Rogerson might have written this yesterday: “If people say it happened to them you’ve got to believe or you are a heartless monster who is prolonging their pain. How can you be blind and deaf to this distress and agony? Thus was Rebecca Nurse, an innocent woman of Salem, condemned. After the jury, using their last gasp of common sense, had acquitted her, the accusers went into another fit: How can you be blind and deaf to the pain? So they changed their verdict and hanged her” – while folklorist Mike Goss traces the child-abduction-and-abuse motif back to pre-Christian Rome, and observes: “We can see well enough what the bogeyman was for. We are so concerned for our children’s welfare – we are so terrified that they will be abducted and abused by aliens – that we project into their consciousness certain images of abductor-abusers which we find particularly terrifying. For many modern adults Satanists probably pose a more credible and invidious threat than those old-time Jews, fairies, gypsies...” And: “I believe we can say that the material reveals a general or thematic pattern. Two symbols of innocence, vulnerability, and of our future are being threatened with blight and oblivion. They are being stolen from us: metaphorically as where the kidnap is replaced by corruption and subversion, which essentially alienates the victim from the rest of us; but also literally – the kidnap rumour *per se*... The Enemy is always a self-contained alien group (which may, however, possess so loose an identity that we can only label it as ‘strangers’ or ‘perverts’). The Enemy strikes at us through our children... It is not merely that all we hallow in our culture is being corrupted and taken away. Without the bearers of children to continue that culture, without the children themselves, there will be no culture. This is what we are encouraged to protect by these stories.” Roger Sandell gives us a wonderfully concise history of modern Satanism, revealing along the way how phoney it’s all been, comparing it with the latter-day, utterly fantastical claims of RSA proponents: “...the idea of ritual abuse... involves mass ceremonies with elaborate rituals at which babies and other children are habitually sacrificed. This is apparently present to a degree that permeates all society. According to Gordon Thomas... there are 100,000 Satanists in Britain who include senior police officers and Salvation Army members. At American seminars claims have been made that 50,000 human sacrifices take place every year in the USA – twice the FBI figures for murders of all types.” Under Sandell’s steely gaze, RSA goes all the way downhill from there. In passing he notes the parallels with first-person accounts from the outer fringes of abduction lore. The piece is aptly titled “From Evidence of Abuse to Abuse of Evidence”.

Abduction lore was never calculated to excite *Magonia* writers (one of the funniest



LEFT: *Magonia* editor John Rimmer seen here in an FT file photo from ‘back in the day’.

“YOU LEAVE THE  
PENNSYLVANIA  
STATION ‘BOUT A  
QUARTER TO FOUR,  
READ A MAGAZINE  
AND SOON YOU’RE IN  
BALTIMORE”  
*Mack Gordon,  
Chattanooga  
Choo Choo*

items published was John Harney’s take on the Linda Napolitano/Brooklyn Bridge saga as related by Budd Hopkins), at least on the literal level. A couple of seminal items can’t go unnoticed: Martin Kottmeyer’s piece “Entirely Unprejudiced” took a rather rash phrase of Thomas ‘Ed’ Bullard, suggesting that Betty and Barney Hill were blank slates about aliens and abduction before being trailed and nabbed in 1961, and whistled it straight to the cleaners. As he put it: “If the UFO phenomenon is an artifact of culture, one would reasonably expect that cultural antecedents could be recognised for the major features it presents. Extraterrestrials, however, should be independent of culture and if they are newly arrived their characteristics should represent a discontinuity with the past.” This latter, he demonstrates, is a dog that don’t hunt. Peter Rogerson, who either never slept or had no social life, produced a massively detailed three-part pre-history

of abductions, “Fairlyland’s Hunters”, which showed from another angle that the Hills had plenty of forerunners in the spacenapping stakes, even if they were unaware of them. The point being that the Hills’ experience was not as seminal as it’s usually taken to be. It would be fatuous to try to summarise this huge piece of work: we just urge you to look it up and read it through.

Kottmeyer – who wrote stacks of other fine pieces and series for the magazine – unearthed the curious fact that the ‘wrap-around’ eyes archetypical of alien ‘grays’ first surfaced in an episode of TV series *The Outer Limits* titled ‘The Bellerose Shield’ (see FT322:46-48). This aired about 10 days before Barney Hill was hypnotised – and hadn’t appeared in what we know of his accounts previously. (It was also under hypnosis that Betty’s initial description of the aliens’ noses as “Jimmy Durante schnozzles” sanforized themselves down to little stubby things.) It is only fair to say that Betty denied in several interviews that she and Barney ever watched such shows on television, although direct viewing is hardly the only way Barney could have heard about the Bellerose alien’s appearance. It’s also true that Jason Colavito has produced sundry other instances of TV shows that may have influenced Barney’s account. Perhaps no less to the point though is that while Kottmeyer produced a fairly comprehensive demolition of the ‘entirely unprejudiced’ proposition, it’s been the wraparound eyes that have generated the most ire and excitement. *Magonia* was never intended not to question and disturb received opinion, and had a kind of genius for finding, or being found by, writers of a certain iconoclastic disposition.

There’s just space to mention David Simpson’s hilarious hoax on the Warminster skywatchers in 1970 (see FT331:40-47). Essentially, Simpson and his co-conspirators shone a purple light from across the way from the skywatchers and then discreetly made off, and that was about it. A lengthy report appeared in due course in *Flying Saucer Review*, with solemn analyses of photographs and descriptions of the light behaving in ways it didn’t and couldn’t have. When *FSR* editor Charles Bowen learned the truth, he was incandescent, and rather ruder about Simpson and his cohorts than one would expect from such a mild-mannered man. But still. For those prepared to absorb the lesson, the Simpson ‘experiment’ did have many a ramification for UFO reports, and perhaps for experiences too.

We could go on for many more pages about the joys of *Magonia*, but that will have to do. It was a unique, original publication, and an essential addition to the forteen bookshelf. Pretty much as much fun as listening to the Beatles.

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## An unnatural history of ghosts

Authors should be wary when dealing with the BBC says **ROGER CLARKE** – Auntie and friends might just pinch your book title.

A few weeks ago an astrologer friend got in touch to say the BBC was trailing a new Radio Four series with my book's name tacked onto the top. It was the first I'd heard about it.

*A Natural History of Ghosts* was published by Penguin in 2012 and went on to sell very successfully around the world, including Korea, Japan, Spain and Germany. The title came to me first, like a kind of gift. I wrote the book around the title. The title encapsulated the idea that it didn't matter whether you believe in ghosts or not, the idea of ghost-seeing was rich enough in itself. And that in many cases – including Borley Rectory – the people were more interesting than the ghosts anyway.

I knew others would come after and use elements of the book, just as I used elements of other people's books, including Owen Davies and David Clarke – all properly thanked and acknowledged upfront. The original research I did showing that the haunting of Hinton Ampner was the source story of *Turn of the Screw* and recently *The Haunting of Bly Manor* ("The House that was Haunted to Death", **FT309:28-32**) was something I was especially proud of, especially when Sir Christopher Frayling publicly endorsed my theory. Nearly all writers of non-fiction dread and fear the moment that their books will be exploited without thanks by TV and radio production companies. Indeed, I even had lunch with one well-known writer who had managed to get an entire Sky series based without credit on one of his books stopped in its



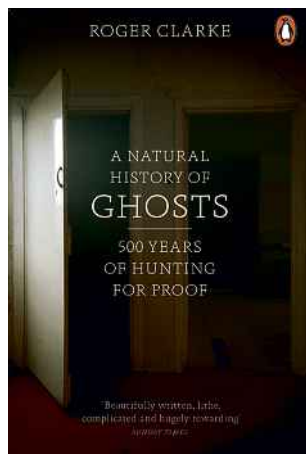
**ABOVE:** Glasgow-based writer-turned-radio-presenter Kirsty Logan, who somehow managed to forget reading Roger Clarke's book, even though she'd recommended it on her website.

tracks and never broadcast. One hoped the news got around these production companies that they were playing with fire.

I immediately tweeted from my account @skionar to the presenter and apparent writer of the series, Kirsty Logan. She answered me very politely and said she was so sorry but she didn't really know my book but that she looked forward to reading it. This, I felt, seemed fair enough, though I was a little sceptical that she had not come across my work. Not even in a Google search did my book come up, I asked querulously? No, she replied sweetly. "Though it sounds fascinating."

Then the plot thickened. Another twitter user, Richard Kovitch, pointed out that she had actually *recommended* my book in 2016. Johnny Mains noted that she had even tagged me on her contemporaneous tweet about it. And, indeed, her recommendation was still live on her website. I learned she was a young writer from Glasgow – a very keen and ambitious one.

Then the tweets and website references started disappearing. I had, of course, anticipated this



and screen-capped them all. She then partially restored her website recommendation, which sowed the seed of doubt in the minds of some observers, one of whom claimed I was 'lying'. Yet another twitter user came to my rescue by showing evidence that she had deleted her website piece by the time I tweeted, and subsequently restored it.

It all started unravelling for Kirsty Logan and the BBC. The R4 twitter feed stripped all reference to the 10-part series. I asked my readers to complain to the BBC. FT's Chris Josiffe, who had been interviewed about his Gef the Talking Mongoose book, publicly dissociated himself from the show and asked for his podcast contribution to be removed. A twitter thread I put together was retweeted by many, including the

historian Tom Holland. Privately, some big names on R4 contacted me to express their dismay.

But there was more. On the first day of broadcast I posted a link to Kirsty Logan's Instagram page, where she can be seen holding a copy of my book in her hand!

Finally the BBC took notice. I was contacted. The title was changed to *A History of Ghosts*, though only on the website. When I was asked for further clarification as to whether this title change was permanent, I was simply referred to the public complaints website.

I have a case, I'm told, for passing-off. Two of the contributors contributed because they thought the series was connected to my book. That's the key. Passing-off is a legal term, which is not the same as plagiarism but related to trademark law, where you claim to represent something else. *A Natural History of Ghosts* has only ever been used once before, and that was by me. The BBC could so easily have called their series *A Natural History of the Supernatural* and none of this would have happened.

The BBC contacted complainants to say they were sorry they had caused me 'distress', but, by any standard, the issue was handled poorly. The BBC should hold themselves to a higher standard than the industry norm.

My sales have gone through the roof and there was a hasty reprint; at one point, twitter was posting which bookshops had it in stock as if it was an urgent samizdat text. The support I've had has been wonderful.

Under conventional plagiarism laws, I don't own the title of my book. But I do own the private haunted space it has made.

◆ **ROGER CLARKE** is a former writer and film critic at the *Independent* and a regular contributor to FT. His book *A Natural History of Ghosts* is available from Penguin.

## In search of Burke and Hare

**JAN BONDESON** looks for traces of Edinburgh's most infamous serial killers in the modern city.

Much has been written about those fiends of the Old Town, Burke and Hare, Edinburgh's most celebrated serial killers, who murdered a number of people for the purpose of selling their bodies for dissection at the anatomy school of Dr Robert Knox. William Burke was born in 1792 in Urney, County Tyrone, one of two sons of middle-class parents. In 1818, he deserted his wife and family, moving to Scotland, where he became a navvy helping to construct the Union Canal, settling down near Falkirk with his common-law wife Helen M'Dougal. Moving to Edinburgh, he became a hawker selling old clothes to impoverished people, before trying his luck as a cobbler. About the mystery man William Hare, little is known except he was an illiterate Irish lad who turned up in Edinburgh in the mid-1820s, living in a small lodging-house off Tanner's Close, West Port, run by a man named Logue. When this individual died, Hare moved in with Logue's Irish-born wife Margaret. In 1827 Burke and Hare both worked as agricultural labourers in Penicuik; they became friends and it has been suggested that Burke and Helen M'Dougal moved into the Tanner's Close lodging-house as well, drinking and carousing, and leading a riotous life.

In late November 1827, an old army veteran named Donald died at Hare's lodging-house, owing £4 worth of back rent. Thinking that the old man would be worth more dead than he had been alive, Burke and Hare sold his body to the celebrated



Edinburgh anatomist Robert Knox, at his anatomy school in Surgeon's Square, for £7 10s. The princely sum paid, without any awkward questions asked, for the cadaver of the old soldier set the two ruffians thinking. What if they murdered various down-and-out characters in the slums of Edinburgh in a way that made it difficult to tell that they had been deliberately done to death, and then sold the corpses to Knox? There is reason to believe that their first victim was a miller named Joseph who lodged in Hare's house: after he had been sedated with some liberal tots of whisky, Burke pinned him down by laying across his upper torso as Hare suffocated him to death with a pillow. In total they claimed 16 victims, all killed in the same manner, among them the young prostitute Mary Paterson and the invalid lad James Wilson, a street character known as Daft Jamie. Their final victim was an Irishwoman named Margaret Docherty, whose body was discovered by some other lodgers who called in the police. Burke and Hare made haste to sell the cadaver to Dr Knox, but a public-spirited lodger identified it in Knox's dissection-room and the two ruffians were arrested.

In the trial of William Burke, which opened on Christmas Eve 1828 before



*In total, they claimed 16 victims, all killed in the same*

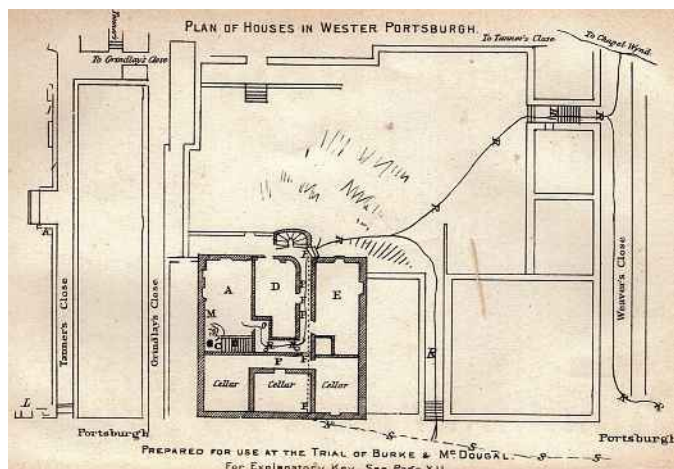
the High Court of Justiciary in the Parliament House, the slimy Hare turned King's evidence, blaming Burke for everything. Burke was found guilty of murder and was sentenced to be hanged and publicly dissected. Awaiting execution, Burke made a partial confession, putting much of the blame on Hare. He was hanged on 28 January 1829 in front of an enormous crowd and publicly dissected by Professor Munro a few days later: his mounted skeleton stands at the Anatomical



LEFT: Burke and Hare, drawings from G. MacGregor, *The History of Burke and Hare* (Glasgow, 1884). BELOW: A caricature of Robert Knox.

Museum of the University of Edinburgh, while Surgeon's Hall has his death mask and a book bound in his skin. Helen M'Dougal made a swift escape from Edinburgh, pursued by an angry mob. Although Daft Jamie's family urged that Hare should also be prosecuted, this was not possible according to the legislation of the time. Hare also left Edinburgh in a hurry, probably for his native Ireland, although no historian has been able to track him down. A cutting from the *Newry Commercial Telegraph* of 31 March 1829 claims that Hare turned up at a public house in Scarva, County Armagh, with his wife and child, but he was recognised by the mob and run out of town. According to an article in *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* of 22 December 1861, the Canadian correspondent of the *Scotsman* had heard a story that Hare had died in that country. The *Weekly Scotsman* of 26 August 1916 prefers a more sanguinary tale: Hare got employment at a lime kiln, but the other workers found out about his true identity and threw him into the lime so that he was blinded; he ended his days as a blind beggar in London's Oxford Street. In an article marking the centenary of the murders, the *Nottingham Evening Post* of 26 November 1927 prefers the version that Hare ended up as a blind beggar selling matches in London's Burlington Arcade for 40 years.

There has been a good deal of speculation, from various ill-informed Internet sources, that Burke and Hare lived on the southern side of what is today the West Port in Edinburgh's Old Town, but a map in the 1884 book *The History of Burke and*



ABOVE LEFT: A map of the West Port neighbourhood, from G MacGregor, *The History of Burke and Hare* (Glasgow, 1884). ABOVE CENTRE: Burke's house, from *The West Port Murders* (Edinburgh, 1829). ABOVE RIGHT: Hare's house in Tanner's Close, where most of the murders took place, from the *Weekly Scotsman*, 19 July 1902. BELOW: Knox's house at what is today 17 Newington Road.

*Hare* by George MacGregor, and perusal of the 1852 Ordnance Survey map of Edinburgh, clearly demonstrates that the two villains lived on the north side of this thoroughfare, roughly where the large modern tenement called Webster's Land is today. The MacGregor map may well be somewhat over-simplified: on the Ordnance Survey map it looks as if there is another tenement between Burke's house and Grindlay's Close, whereas Hare's humble dwelling is situated behind another, taller house in the West Port, and accessed through Tanner's Close. The 1893 Ordnance Survey map shows Tanner's Close and Hare's house still intact, although the building situated at the site of Burke's house now has a different shape. In July 1902, the Edinburgh newspapers could announce that Hare's house was to be demolished as part of a slum clearance; Burke's house had been pulled down some time ago, it was stated. Thus nothing remains today of two of Edinburgh's most celebrated murder houses; both Tanner's Close and Grindlay's Close have disappeared from the Edinburgh map, for good.

Many Edinburgh people were outraged that Robert Knox, who was widely thought to share the moral responsibility for the murders, had escaped entirely without punishment. On 12 February 1829, a large

mob congregated on Calton Hill, before setting out for Knox's house at 4 Newington Place, carrying with them a life-sized effigy of the anatomist clad in a gaudy waistcoat and bearing the label 'Knox, the associate of the infamous Hare'. They hung the effigy from the branch of a tree

and tried to set it alight; when it failed to catch fire, they instead tore it into little pieces. Knox's house was stoned and many windows broken, the railings destroyed and the front garden trampled. The fearful anatomist sneaked out through the back door and took refuge in the house

of a friend. Knox remained in Edinburgh until 1842, but his career never recovered. He then moved to London and died there in obscurity in 1862.

It is not generally known that Robert Knox's house at 4 Newington Place, from which he had such a narrow escape from the Edinburgh mob back in 1829, is still standing today. In 1885, the terrace of Newington Place was incorporated into Newington Road, and the houses renumbered; in Victorian times, a shop was constructed in its front garden. This shop is today Euroclean Dry Cleaners, and behind it, Dr Knox's house, at what is today 17 Newington Road, is daily passed by throngs of people oblivious of this curious relic from the days of Burke and Hare.

## SOURCES

This is an edited extract from Jan Bondeson's book *Murder Houses of Edinburgh* (Troubador Publishing, 2020). There are many books about the misdeeds of Burke and Hare, including those by J Barzun (Ed.), *Burke and Hare* (Metuchen, NJ, 1974), H Douglas, *Burke & Hare* (London, 1974), OD Edwards, *Burke & Hare* (Edinburgh, 1980), B Bailey, *Burke and Hare* (Edinburgh, 2002) and L Rosner, *The Anatomy Murders* (Philadelphia, PA, 2010).

♦♦ JAN BONDESON is a senior lecturer at Cardiff University, the author of numerous books on *fortean* and medical curiosities and a regular contributor to FT.



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## Reality and surreality intertwined

This truly mind-bending work, says **Marcus Williamson**, is a tour-de-force trip through contemporary occult and popular culture, a madly spinning windmill of the mind

### The English Heretic Collection

**Ritual Histories, Magickal Geography**

Andy Sharp

Repeater Books 2020

Pb, £12.99, 427pp, ISBN 9781913462093

Andy Sharp is best known as the musician who creates aural collages from a heady blend of electronica and sampled spoken-word esoterica. *The English Heretic Collection* is his latest creative manifestation, a collection of essays reflecting 15 years of research into wyrd culture.

Just as with Sharp's musical collages, the literary *English Heretic* conflates Sixties and Seventies horror B-movies with esoterica, pulp fiction with folklore and the occult, WWII plane wreckage with surrealism. He revels in subverting our rule-based, linear, chronological and mono-topographical view of the world, suspending disbelief on his mission "to make meaning in search of imaginal truth".

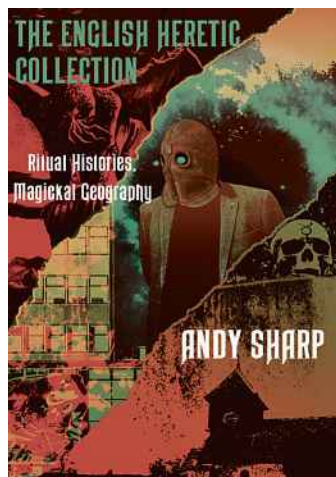
In reading his accounts, we become witness to the dark underbelly of popular counterculture, the intertwining of reality and surreality, where past, present and future are confounded. He speaks of "place as a means of fecundating the imagination", of using locations as talismans, such as at Orford Ness in Suffolk, an atomic research and testing station close to Rendlesham Forest, famed for its UFO sightings and for Kenneth Grant's Typhonian rituals. Or Boleskine House on Loch Ness, once the domain of the occultist Aleister Crowley and later acquired by Led Zeppelin founder, Jimmy Page.

Amongst the myriad of novel concepts to be found, like coruscating fragments of jet amongst

these texts, is the concept of nuclear semiotics: how to convey the danger of atomic waste to future generations, a task beyond the epoch-constrained limits of written language. As Sharp notes presciently, "our current language and symbols will lose their ability to deter human intrusion to radioactive storage sites".

Sharp conjures with two kinds of magic in these essays: a *mimetic* magic, whereby situations, people and places become irrevocably and inextricably associated; and a *contagious* magic, whose spells he invokes through his numerous site visits, field recordings and documentation, bringing new significance to remnants that might otherwise be discarded or ignored.

*English Heretic* is also the spiritual home of the Black Plaque – that countercultural antidote



to the Blue Plaque of English Heritage. Instead of an "entirely dry rendering of history", as commemorated by the official markers, Sharp's plaques celebrate the misfits, magicians and anti-heroes, such as their first awardee, Michael Reeves, the director of the Sixties historical

### Diving deep and getting lost in the neural network of Sharp's fecund imagination

horror film, *Witchfinder General*. The act of placing the plaque finds its origins in the *terma* tradition of Tibetan Bon Buddhism, where an object holding hidden teachings is secreted so that it can be found and rediscovered by a searcher in the future.

Black Plaque recipients, Sharp says, "have a curative aspect" and their "irrational programmes and my obsession with them must in some way represent my own self-destructive tendencies". Yet, from his personal act of self-destruction comes creation, like the alchemical transformation of base metal into gold.

The actor Charles McKeown once said that watching Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil* was a bit like lifting the top off Gilliam's head, looking in and replacing it very quickly. By contrast, reading *The English Heretic Collection* is like lifting the top off Andy Sharp's head, diving deep and getting lost in the neural network of his fecund imagination. The author even ponders whether the circumstances of his own birth could be the cause of his fractal thinking: "Perhaps my rather hasty labour has been echoed in my creative delivery, distinctly overloaded and crammed with interconnections – a rather exhausting process."

If there's a fault in all of this it's that Sharp's tantalising factual snippets in so many cases demand more explanation and references, so that the reader

may continue the adventure where he has left off. A work so replete with obscure cultural and occult references cries out for an appendix, footnotes or endnotes or, paradoxically, its own discrete guidebook – an A to Z map or even a concordance – to help the psychic geographer on their way through the dreamlike matrix.

Sharp's journeys thus become powerful inspirational stimulants for the reader to trace their own magickal path. In following his meanderings through place and time, the reader becomes enmeshed in this rich mind web that Sharp weaves. And then, triggered by his liberally sprinkled messages to the subconscious, finds oneself darting off onto altogether unexpected byways. This is a truly mind-bending work, in the most positive sense.

As Sharp himself says: "The imagination is no fool, it's very much an imp of the perverse, it will bleed across the margins of any tightly defined borders. Its spores will scatter to neighbouring fields..." And writing of the inspirations for his adventures, with a nod to one of the wyrddest works by a master of surrealism, he continues "the clown demons of the Black Plaques refuse to remain quiet, they lurch – like Max Ernst's *Angel of Hearth and Home* – across the chapters of someone else's tragedy and trajectory, they usurp other plots and terrains".

*The English Heretic Collection* is a *tour de force* through contemporary occult and popular culture, a madly spinning windmill of the mind. It's a work that leaves the reader haunted by the multitude of interconnections that cram its pages, forcing a stark re-evaluation of former certainties.

★★★★★

# Was Arthur historical?

A painstaking study of the early sources unsurprisingly reaches no solid conclusion

## King Arthur

Man or Myth

Tony Sullivan

Pen & Sword 2020

Hb, 246pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781526763679

Perhaps no figure blurs the line between myth and history as much as King Arthur. Was there an historical Arthur, and if so how much does he resemble his literary counterpart? In general, historians and archaeologists tend to think that Arthur is a legendary or literary figure, or that if he did exist we know nothing about him. This hasn't stopped countless writers from seeking evidence of an historical Arthur in the frustratingly incomplete source material. In *King Arthur: Man or Myth*, former fire investigator Tony Sullivan joins the debate.

His book is focused on a round-up of the extant sources for Arthur and his age, including those (like Gildas) that say nothing at all about him. By examining all of the available sources right up to the Middle Ages, Sullivan hopes to identify which Arthurian theories might be correct, and which lack any foundation in the evidence, even if he can't come to any specific conclusion.

Sullivan's approach to the sources is thorough and inclusive. Going source by source, he discusses contemporary textual records such as the writings of Saint Patrick, moving on to Gildas, Bede, Nennius, the Welsh Annals, saints' lives, Geoffrey of Monmouth, French romances and more.

This painstaking, comparative approach does a good job of showing the ways in which the sources agree and disagree, as well as which texts influenced each other. Despite expressing

some scepticism about his sources, Sullivan seldom really engages with them as literary works, although he does observe that some quite early ones are written for an audience who presumably know who Arthur is.

In the end, Sullivan's conclusion is unsurprising: there may have been an historical figure named Arthur who flourished some time between 450 and 550 and whose career inspired the later literary figure, but it's impossible to say for certain.

*King Arthur: Man or Myth* is aimed at the newcomer to

Arthuriana. For example, Sullivan takes the time to point out that early Arthur stories often don't include characters and elements familiar to modern readers, or gently debunks ideas that no one who has studied late Roman or

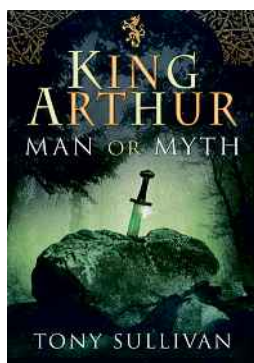
early mediæval history holds, but which might be common among people who haven't. The slight bibliography tends to support this view.

Unfortunately, this book is somewhat let down by what looks like hasty, sloppy editing. Maps are fuzzy and ugly (although not hard to read), and there are numerous simple grammatical errors and misspellings.

Sullivan's work is at its best when it demonstrates the difficulties of trying to establish a single timeline from the available sources, in the process critiquing Arthurian theories that rely too heavily on a single source. It could be a handy work for someone interested in the types of available evidence for an historical Arthur.

James Holloway

★ ★ ★



## A History of English Place Names and Where They Came From

John Moss

Pen & Sword 2020

Hb, 408pp, £25, ISBN 9781526722843

The title is self-explanatory. The author's previous book for this publisher is *Great British Family Names and Their History*.

The current work spends the first couple of dozen pages setting the scene. There's a glossary of terms encountered in the Domesday Book, to give an understanding of life at that time. Then we have a useful section on common elements of place-names, from a variety of sources such as Old English and Celtic; for example *bury* is Old English for a (fortified) manor house. We then have a very short history of migrations and invasions of England, all of which have left their mark on the names we use today. Placename origins is next, pulling together the logic with which our various ancestors named their locations. And finally a few pages on the ranks of people who would have an interest in the land.

The meat of the book is 317 pages of placenames and their origins. My first gripe is that it is arranged geographically: the North East, the North West. However there is an index at the back so that can be used as an alphabetical sort. Descriptions vary from two to three lines up to about half a page. But there are strange omissions. There is a section on Greater London looking at the boroughs and townships and places therein, but no entry for London itself. And there are some locations covered in the introductory chapters but not in the body of the text.

The elephant in the room is that there is already a well established text covering very similar ground, *Brewer's Britain and Ireland – The History, Culture, Folklore and Etymology of 7500 Places in These Islands*. The page count of *Brewer's* is three times that of this book. It covers Britain and Ireland, not just England. And it goes into a lot of places in more depth. But the Moss book has some places not in *Brewer's*.



And they give different information – not contradicting each other but offering different peripheral material. *Brewer's* gives location details such as other towns nearby and rivers and what is happening there now, whereas Moss gives more historical information about changes in the location over time, including a nice list of alternative names through the years. And Moss finishes with a chapter of novel, odd and unusual place names. But the names used are only in this section, so if you are interested in the origin of Wetwang you will not find it in the North East chapter – you can only locate it by using the index.

You'll find this book useful and enjoyable and occasionally frustrating, but I don't think you will regret having it. *Brewer's* is £5 more expensive and generally the one I will reach for first, but I'll check this book afterwards for the extra snippets of information I know I will find.

Gordon Rutter

★ ★ ★

## The Science of Sherlock Holmes

Stewart Ross

Michael O'Mara Books 2020

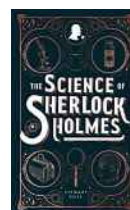
Hb, 192pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781789292190

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's medical training gave him an advantage when he created his "scientific detective". In many respects Sherlock Holmes was an early adopter in applying scientific principles to crime, combining careful observation with hypothesis testing based on the evidence. Stewart Ross argues that Holmes's combination of intellect, forensic skill and practical, if idiosyncratic, knowledge accounts in large part for the longevity of his popularity.

Ross sets out to examine the

links between Holmes's methods and scientific progress in the late 19th century. He interprets science loosely, as he looks at technology as well. Short chapters cover medicine and forensic science, plus animals, weaponry, optics, developments in transport and communications, and miscellaneous scientific understanding. Topics are illustrated by reference to the stories in which they feature.

Advances in a particular field





are occasionally tracked to the present, but space constraints necessarily limit these to a quick sketch. Sometimes the relevance of a point is obscure – a brief explanation of the difference between internal and external combustion may be interesting but it throws little light on the Holmes stories.

Despite the depiction of Holmes's dedication to cool logic, Ross shows that, unsurprisingly, Conan Doyle was primarily concerned to present a good yarn, and often Holmes's reasoning, while entertaining, does not withstand close scrutiny. Conan Doyle was happy to bend science in the interests of the plot, and the amount of scientific content in the later stories, produced long after he had ceased to practise medicine, declined and became less accurate.

This is a quick read in bite-size chunks, and anyone who enjoys the Holmes stories yet knows very little about the science and technology of the period will enjoy it. But it is far from the first book on science and the Holmes stories, not even the first with this precise title. As Ross includes better ones in the short bibliography, it is a puzzle what he thought he was contributing to the already extensive body of works dedicated to literature's most famous detective.

Tom Ruffles

★★

## Magic in the Landscape

Earth Mysteries & Geomancy

Nigel Pennick

Destiny Books 2020

Pb, 176pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781620558799

In this reissue of his 2013 book Nigel Pennick's main focus is how people enchant the landscape (or discover the mystical within it), and themselves become re-enchanted from their experience of place.

Certain topics are well covered, such as leys, crossroads, graveyards and the relationship between heavenly bodies and the landscape, yet there are several which aren't as familiar. Two in particular I found fascinating. The first is the relationship between 17th-century landscape architects such as Sir William Chambers and Feng Shui. (This

also answers a question I've had for a long time about the Chinese Tower in the English Garden here in Munich). The second is the chapter about triangular areas of land such as Devil's Holes, cocked hats or gilltraps, and is important in its discussion of how patches of waste-ground can be as mystical to communities as churches.

Pennick is especially strong when talking about temporary fairs, drawing on personal experience as a participant in the Rougham Fair in Suffolk, and Lyng Fair, Norfolk. It's also reassuring to read about Stonehenge, in terms of its continuing relevance to communities, from the post-mediaeval period to the festival of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and beyond.

There is real passion, and at times anger, about the treatment of the landscape. This is particularly noticeable when he is talking about enclosure, a process of disenfranchisement which saw the common land in England divided up into individual allotments for landowners.

Where I might disagree with Pennick's arguments surrounding archaeology put forward in the book (many archaeologists share his passion for how people engage with place, including me), this is an interesting examination of geomancy and its role in shaping our experience of landscape.

Steve Toase

★★★★

## A Dark History of Tea

Seren Charrington-Hollins

Pen & Sword 2020

Hb, 184pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781526761606

For centuries, tea was known only to the Chinese and Japanese (the Mongol rulers saw it as a sign of decadence). Every detail of tea preparation, from the slow mountain streams where the best water was sourced, to the implements for its preparation, the handling of the leaves, and even the mentality of the drinker and the atmosphere in which tea was to be drunk was raised to a ceremonial art by scholars and monks. Apart from the suicide of Japanese Tea Master, Sen no Rikyu (1522-1591), this era of its history is not dark, rather decidedly tranquil,

as is the early history of tea in north-western Europe, remaining an elite luxury throughout the 17th and early 18th centuries, although certain coffee houses gained notoriety.

With the opium-tea-silver triangle opened between Britain, India and China by the East India Company, trading tea for opium, which they exported to China for silver, conditions were created for China's serious social and economic undermining that led to mass addiction, political instability and the Opium Wars. As the national debt spiralled, driven by these and other colonial wars, rising taxes and import duties triggered the smuggling of tea by gangs whose ferocity rivals modern drug gangs for how they treated those accused of stealing their tea. In common with today's lab-concocted drugs, adulterating materials like iron filings were a danger in the manufacture of "smouch", counterfeit tea. Sugar might have glass in it; milk could have chalk or boracic acid, approved by Mrs Beeton.

With tea cultivated in Upper Assam by the 1830s, migrant labourers from poor castes, whose low position let them handle the fertilising animal bone ash taboo to others, endured a living hell of harsh work, disease, starvation, squalor and torture. Meanwhile, the British press contrived an illusion of pluckers joyfully harvesting tea, much like village maidens picking wildflowers. The abortions and beatings endured by these female "coolies" only became a concern in the early 20th century. All this misery was simultaneous with the emergence of that most genteel of rites: the ladies' afternoon tea party.

By way of poisoned tea, and sorcery-swindles, the author concludes with a guide to tea-leaf scrying and a glossary of meanings for about 200 tea leaf signs, an art whose decline has been hastened by the invention of the tea bag; and yet can any self-respecting tea drinker be entirely free of tea-related superstitions?

A short work on the dynamics between a natural stimulant and national cultures and commerce, mainly of the British: emphasising the greed, exploitation, beliefs, crimes, eccentricities

and sorcery stimulated by the world's most popular hot beverage, this is a strong brew, well served with imagery. If tea's your choice, put the kettle on and read it.

Jerry Glover

★★★★★

## Aftershocks and Opportunities

Scenarios for a Post-Pandemic Future

ed. Rohit Talwar, Steve Wells, Alexandra Whittington

Fast Future Publishing 2020

Pb, 192pp, £12.95, ISBN 9781999931162

Published back in the distant days of May 2020, this book was clearly written quickly, consisting of some 30 short essays by "future thinkers" covering society and social policy, government and economy and business and technology.

Things have moved on, and the book was written without the benefit of our expensively bought hindsight. One essay mentions a worst case where there are 10 million infections by the end of 2020; we are now at over 50 million. The issue of who will win the US election in the light of the pandemic, or whether it will even take place, is no longer a matter of speculation.

The essays are rational and sensible, covering topics like health policy, strategies for dealing with future pandemics and why remote working might not continue post-pandemic. Such logical thinking jars against the messy, irrational reality of the last six months, in which world leaders downplay the virus, governments make repeated policy U-turns and blame each other, and the clash between economics and public health has turned deadly.

In some ways *Aftershocks and Opportunities* is too late; but in other ways it is too early. Perhaps sometime in late 2021 we will be able to absorb its ideas with the necessary detachment. At present reading this feels like perusing a book on the future of marine engineering as the *Titanic* sinks beneath the waves.

David Hambling

★★



# Vampiric explorations

An encyclopædia has too many inaccurate translations; but a new history of vampires is detailed, absorbing and crisply written

## Encyclopedia of Vampire Mythology

Theresa Bane

McFarland 2019

Pb, 207pp, £32.95, ISBN 9781476681771

## The Vampire

A New History

Nick Groom

Yale University Press 2020

Pb, 320pp, £9.99, ISBN 9780300254839

Vampires must constitute the mythological success story of the past couple of centuries, rising from obscure and localised beginnings to spawn a continuing industry not just of novels, movies, tours and costumes but also of serious academic studies that bring into play a bewildering range of theories and methodologies.

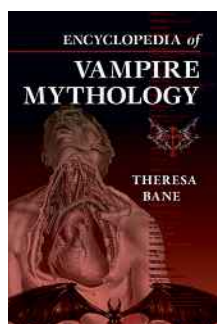
The two works reviewed here both deal mainly with what people have thought about vampires rather than the fictions they inspired, but there the similarities end.

Theresa Bane's *Encyclopedia of Vampire Mythology* first appeared in 2010 as part of an eight-volume reference series on the supernatural.

It functions essentially as a dictionary that relentlessly and somewhat indiscriminately lists the name of every supernatural being that could be described as "vampiric" (a favourite adjective applied without analysis) along with entries on anything associated with them, such as "green" or "hair".

Designed for dipping rather than reading at length, it boasts an extensive bibliography, but the entries themselves don't examine their sources and rely far too much on inaccurate translations that turn specific supernatural beings into vaguely related manifestations of the familiar, all-purpose vampire, forgetting that differences are at least as important as similarities.

The Greek Empouse *doesn't* translate as vampire, nor do Incubus, Banshee, Grendel or Chupacabra, while declaring the Sile na Gig (a name given to an enigmatic type of female figure usually found carved on churches) to be "a type of vampiric earth spirit" involves



baseless speculation and culturally inappropriate categorisation. Entries on those blood-drinking revenants who do (by reason of place and period as well as behaviour) fit the vampire profile tend to be (inevitably) repetitive, reflecting slight localised variations of terminology rather than different types of beliefs.

By contrast Nick (the Prof of Goth) Groom's book, first published more expensively in 2018, puts context centre stage, revealing vampires as little capsules of historic ideas to be found embedded in a variety of discourses concerning theology, economics, medicine and politics.

Indeed, he covers a vast amount of relevant background in a fairly short book (206 pages of main text, the rest being index, notes and a bibliography it would require an undead lifespan to explore thoroughly).

I had doubted that there could be a new history of the vampire, but this absorbing account uncovers those very aspects of the belief that kept (and keep) it vital.

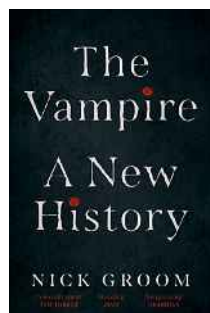
Groom points out that the desire to view vampirism in terms of age-old folklore and tradition relates more to its Gothification in fiction, while by contrast the first 18th-century written accounts report it as something current

and dangerous, an infection as seen by local believers but a disruption of order as viewed by Western observers worried by illegal desecrations.

From this starting point the concept plays its part in debates on the circulation of blood and the circulation of currency, the spread of contagious disease, the politics of capitalism and the philosophies of religion and science.

Most significantly, from the earliest reports of something so unbelievable yet unofficially believed in, accounts of the vampire invite us to examine the value and nature of evidence – who says or records what has happened, and how do context and reception affect the way we process and use this information?

The concluding discussion of the vampire's post-Enlightenment absorption into popular culture



so often.

But Stoker's mother's account of cholera in Ireland fits in particularly well with the larger argument.

Remarkably, in a work that relies on so dense a mesh of historical texts, Groom's writing remains crisp and clear, delighting in a good quotation and exhibiting a sharp turn of phrase.

The final comparison between vampires and potatoes is alone worth the price of this affordable paperback.

Gail-Nina Anderson

*Encyclopedia* ★★★★★  
*The Vampire* ★★★★★

## Lives of the Great Occultists

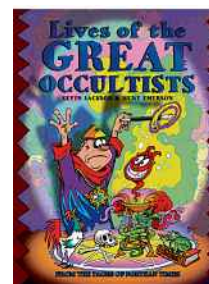
Kevin Jackson & Hunt Emerson

Knockabout Comics 2020

Pb, 111pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780861662845

How many *FT* readers go straight to Phenomenomix when they receive each new issue? The comic page has been an integral part of the package that is *Fortean Times* for years. And now dozens of them have been brought together in a stunning full-colour A4 book.

*Lives of the Great Occultists* includes lots of old favourites, from Roger Bacon, Giordano



day, with William Burroughs, Kenneth Anger and even David Bowie.

And, of course, popping up here and there ("Me again!") and with 11 pages all to himself, is everyone's Uncle Al, the Great Beast himself, 666 emblazoned on his forehead.

Hunt Emerson's wickedly funny drawings are of course a delight, but Kenneth Jackson's well-researched storylines bring out a host of fascinating details. Who knew that women's rights campaigner, free love advocate and psychic Victoria Woodhull had stood for the US presidency in 1872? Or that Orson Welles directed an all-black voodoo version of *Macbeth* in 1936, and that goats were sacrificed to make drum skins for the drummers from Haiti?

This brilliant collection won't be the end to it; in the lives of occultists (great and not so great) there's an endlessly rich seam for Jackson and Emerson to plunder for future stories.

As the pandemic drags on we need humour more than ever. I don't need a scrying mirror to predict that *Lives of the Great Occultists* will be on the Christmas present list (both giving and receiving) for many hundreds of *FT* readers.

David V Barrett  
★★★★★



## SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

DAVID BARRETT ROUNDS UP THE LATEST TITLES FROM THE WORLD OF SPECULATIVE AND FANTASTIC FICTION

### The Many Lives of Heloise Starchild

John Ironmonger

Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2020

Hb, 276pp, £16.99, ISBN 9780297608233

Heloise was born in 1759, when Halley's comet was in the sky; her father, a French nobleman and astronomer, named her after the god of the Sun. Her family are caught up in the horrors of the French Revolution. Katya was born in 1952 in Czechoslovakia. In her dreams she has detailed memories of her multiple-great-grandmother Heloise's life, and of all her matrilineal line in between. The present day of much of John Ironmonger's *The Many Lives of Heloise Starchild* is Katya's story, from her childhood, through the brutal suppression of 1968, and her eventual escape from Czechoslovakia to go in search of the treasure that she has clear memories of Heloise's family burying before their arrest. We also follow Heloise's short life, and her daughter Marianne's mission to avenge her mother's execution, and fragments of other lives in many countries between Heloise and Katya – and beyond. This is a beautifully told version of history, seen through the eyes of young women who can all remember vibrant details of their mothers' and grandmothers' lives.

### False Value

Ben Aaronovitch

Gollancz 2020

Hb, 404pp, £18.99, ISBN 9781473207851

I criticised Ben Aaronovitch's last Rivers of London novel, *Lies Sleeping*, for being too much of an instalment in an overall narrative, too much a police procedural and too slow to get going. I'm delighted to say that his latest has none of those faults. Detective Constable Peter Grant is working in security for a hi-tech company; it takes a couple of chapters to discover he's undercover. Someone has stolen a folding punched-card program for a fairground organ; Peter is searching not just for the cards but for the powerfully magical Mary Engine, designed by Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelace and

powered by ghosts trapped in glass jars. It's an intriguing adventure, with a good balance between Peter's magical police work and his equally supernatural home life with his river goddess partner.

### Green Tea and Other Weird Stories

Sheridan Le Fanu

Oxford University Press 2020

Pb, 498pp, £8.99, ISBN 9780198835882

### There is a Graveyard that Dwells in Man

ed. David Tibet

Strange Attractor 2020

Pb, 440pp, £17.99, ISBN 9781907222610

Two collections of supernatural tales, one by the Victorian writer Sheridan Le Fanu and another edited by esoteric writer, artist and Current 93 musician David Tibet. It's fascinating to follow the evolution of horror, supernatural and weird fiction from Le Fanu through the late 19th- and early 20th-century writers featured in *Graveyard*: Machen, Blackwood and others, including the three Benson brothers, AC, EF and RH, who became Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, author of the wonderfully sharp Mapp and Lucia books, and a Catholic priest, respectively. In both books the pace of the stories is much slower than we're used to today, but that allows for a gradual build-up of unease, which is often missing in today's equivalent. If you like leisurely but scary supernatural stories at Christmas, both of these collections will satisfy.

### She's My Witch

Stewart Home

London Books 2020

Pb, 331pp, £9.99, ISBN 9780995721746

Sometimes a book just doesn't live up to its publicity. Stewart Home's *She's My Witch* is about a London fitness instructor and a Spanish witch and drug addict falling in lust in their 40s. The blurb talks about their past lives (including a gay relationship in the 12th-century Knights Templar) and sexual mysticism, and "the occult and kink". Heady stuff – but it disappoints on all counts.

There's no plot. In chapter after chapter they meet in London cafés and pubs, where they lecture each other about different Tarot packs, old punk bands and obscure foreign language horror movies while having clandestine public sex. And each time we're told in detail what they eat and drink. Dullsville. Avoid.

### The Sunken Land Begins to Rise Again

M John Harrison

Gollancz 2020

Hb, 254pp, £20, ISBN 9780575096356

M John Harrison's *The Sunken Land Begins to Rise Again* is an odd, unsettling story of another couple of middle-aged inequates – but this time it works. Shaw lives in a succession of single rooms in south-west London; his occasional lover Victoria has moved into her late mother's house in a small town in Shropshire. Neither seems to have much connection with the "normal" world. Both are reactive: events and other people happen to them. When they meet, they seem out of synch with each other. They hear voices through the walls or echoing along the street at night; they see disturbing sights, like an acquaintance vanishing into a pool, or a house full of crazy people. The landscape itself often seems more real than the characters. The title is from Charles Kingsley, and his *Water Babies* is one of many recurring watery memes in the novel. It's not a conventional story, and the plot is often opaque – but then, Harrison seems to be saying, so is life.

### Piranesi

Susanna Clarke

Bloomsbury 2020

Hb, 245pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781526622426

Piranesi, the viewpoint character in Susanna Clarke's novel, lives in the House, a huge building with many hundreds of rooms full of statues – think of every museum in the country crashed together. The lower floors are flooded, the upper floors in the clouds. His only companion, who he sees for a short time twice a week,

he calls the Other; he is the one who called him Piranesi. There's a clue in the name: the 18th-century Piranesi was an Italian architect and artist who created etchings of imaginary prisons. As the novel progresses we learn more of the true nature of the House, and of who Piranesi and the Other might be, and of the mutability of time and memory. A beautifully written, complex and convoluted tale which blurs the lines between the real and the imagined.

### The Evidence

Christopher Priest

Gollancz 2020

Hb, 312pp, £20, ISBN 9781473231375

There's more mutability in *The Evidence*, where Christopher Priest returns to his most intriguing creation, the Dream Archipelago, where people and places and time, history and geography, events and stories vary and overlap, where there is not one simple narrative, where everything is subject to change. Mutability is at the heart of this novel. When crime novelist Todd Fremde goes to speak at a conference in a distant country, his long train journey stops suddenly; the gauge of the track has changed, so the train can't continue. A few hours later, without explanation, his journey resumes. "Mutability makes physical changes," a senior detective explains to him. "You can see the changes, be affected by them, but afterwards you can't be sure they happened." Mutability "is both real and unreal, it happens or it is only thought to happen". As a writer there are three types of crime story Todd avoids: locked room, identical twins and "the perfect murder"; now he finds himself drawn into exploring a real-life murder mystery that is all three, and where no version of events can be relied on as fixed. This is a novel about the writer's life and its many annoyances ("I know a great story... you can write it into your next book"), the creation and recreation of story, and – similar to, but very different from, both Clarke's and Harrison's novels – the blurring between reality (whatever that is) and the imagination. Classic Priest.

## Space mum

A new French film uses the trappings of science fiction movies to explore some big themes as they relate to the lives of ordinary people, particularly women



### Proxima

Dir Alice Winocour, France, 2019  
Picturehouse Entertainment, £12.99  
(Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD) + digital

Women have been more prominent in the history of science fiction films than you might think. From Brigitte Helm in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, way back in 1927, though Patricia Neal in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* in the 1950s, Jane Fonda's *Barbarella* in the 1960s, Sigourney Weaver in *Alien* in the 1970s, all the way through to Daisy Ridley in the latest *Star Wars* films, women have played strong roles in the genre. That's not to say such roles have always foregrounded issues of any great depth – *Barbarella* could not fairly be described as ground-breaking – but they are nevertheless there. In *Proxima*, director Alice Winocour has made a film that doesn't just feature a central character who is female, but has a narrative that's minutely concerned with gender issues, primarily inequality.

Sarah Loreau (Eva Green) is an astronaut in the final stages of preparation for Proxima project, a year-long mission to Mars. The physical demands this places on her are extreme and at the same time she is struggling to come to terms with the impending

### *This is a science fiction film very much grounded in the everyday*

separation from her daughter Stella (the delightful Zélie Boulant). The mission commander (Matt Dillon) doesn't rate Sarah and her trainers want to put her on lesser duties. She is also finding it hard to communicate with her ex-husband Thomas (Lars Eidinger) who will be responsible for Stella's care while Sarah is away.

*Proxima* isn't a wholly original film; after all, the 'punishing training under brutal supervision' is the basis for *An Officer and a Gentleman* and the 'career versus family' theme is not uncommon, albeit usually as a subplot. However, it is the way Winocour skilfully merges these two themes that makes the film interesting. The central question is 'How much does Sarah want this?' The scorn and sexism which she encounters at work is contrasted with the gentle vulnerability of her daughter. The honour of taking part in the first manned Mars mission is contrasted with

the quotidian drudgery that is parenting a young child. Her pride in her work is contrasted with her shame at not living up to her ideal of what a mother should be.

As the film progresses, and launch day gets closer, these questions are brought into focus as Stella starts bonding both with her father and Wendy (Sandra Hüller), the psychologist helping Sarah mentally adjust to what she is facing. Sarah's opportunities for seeing Stella are becoming fewer, and once Sarah is placed in quarantine prior to launch, they almost disappear. It is one such occasion that forces Sarah to make a choice and resolve the situation. I won't reveal that, but suffice it to say the ending is both appropriate and satisfying.

It's often the case that science fiction films are big on plot or spectacle, which means that performances can get lost amid the explosions and aliens. That's not the case here, mainly because there are no explosions or aliens. This is a science fiction film very much grounded in the everyday, which allows the cast to draw fully rounded characters. Central to this, of course, is Eva Green. Often miscast, she has more ability than she is usually allowed to show on screen – for every *The Dreamers* there's the sequel to *300*; for every *Casino Royale* there's the sequel to *Sin City*. *Dumbo*, anyone? In *Proxima*, she carries the film and is terrific, which earned her a nomination for Best Actress at the César Awards this year. It isn't going to appeal to anyone who only wants something like *The Martian* or *Red Planet*. There's nothing wrong with that – I love a classic sci-fi flick as much as the next guy – but that's not what *Proxima* is. It's an exploration of big themes as they apply to regular people, particularly women, and of interest to all.

Daniel King



### Dog Soldiers

Dir Neil Marshall, UK, 2002  
Streaming and 4K downloads

A welcome reissue of a fondly remembered British action-comedy-horror. Genre fans will know this one like the back of their hands, but for the uninitiated the basic plot is: a platoon of soldiers on an exercise in a truly wild part of the Scottish Highlands are menaced by a pack of werewolves and make their last stand in a tiny farmhouse.

Horror-comedy is a difficult trick to pull off and, in my humble opinion, only one film – *An American Werewolf in London* – has ever managed it, in that it's very, very frightening and very, very funny. Neil Marshall's film doesn't reach those heights, but it is nevertheless bloody good fun.

It works because the characters are likeable and sympathetic – not always the case with films about squaddies. Twenty years on, some of the dialogue sounds ridiculous (did soldiers ever call each other 'plonkers'?), but the supporting characters do come across as individuals as opposed to mere cannon fodder.

The film is largely carried by Kevin McKidd (*Trainspotting*) as the tough but principled Cooper, and Sean Pertwee as Sarge. It's a wonder that McKidd never became a major star: he looks good, he handles the action well, and has bags of charisma – attributes which Jason Statham has parlayed into global domination. Sean Pertwee, on the other hand, has carved out a good career for himself, and he's the best thing about *Dog Soldiers*. He's the funniest, the most endearing and manages all this despite having to literally hold his guts in for half of the film. There's a subplot about weaponised werewolves, a running joke about football that extends even into the closing credits, a spunky female scientist, and another



entry in the 'Heroic Dogs in Horror Films' list. To top it all off, thanks to this restoration, it looks better than it ever has. In short, there's absolutely nothing to dislike about *Dog Soldiers* and you should watch it at your earliest convenience.

Daniel King



## Tales From the Hood I & II

Dir Rusty Cundieff, Darin Scott, US 1995/2018

BFI, £19.99 (Blu-ray)

Rusty Cundieff and Darin Scott's *Tales from the Hood* landed in 1995, a breath of fresh air in a US horror market overcrowded with disappointing sequels. *Tales* looked backwards, too, in some ways; it was a knowing homage to the glory days of the Amicus horror anthology, but its quartet of grim fables were refracted through Scott's black geek sensibility and Cundieff's socially aware stylings, offering vignettes of various horrors of the Black American experience: corrupt racist cops, Klansmen in politics, domestic abuse, black-on-black violence and the legacy of slavery. But the film's gallery of baddies meet grimly appropriate EC Comics-style comeuppance, and the film offers killer dolls, weird science experiments and walking dead gangbangers to deliver its messages – as well as an unforgettable performance from Clarence Williams III as the, er, rather strange funeral director Mr Simms. Firmly of its time – with an excellent soundtrack of 90s hip hop and some old school special effects – *Tales* remains as relevant, and as much fun, as ever.

Cundieff and Scott obviously felt compelled by the trajectory of Trump's America to return to the format with a 2018 follow-up. Slicker, gorier and more polemical, *Tales II* doesn't feel as essential, despite its engagement; three throwaway comic horrors entertain, but the final story – a deadly serious affair that literally raises the ghost of Emmett Till – sits uneasily within a disappointingly on-the-nose framing tale.

David Sutton



## THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! ([www.peterlaws.co.uk](http://www.peterlaws.co.uk))

### Possessor

Dir Brandon Cronenberg, UK/Canada 2020

On UK release from 27 November

### His House

Dir Remi Weekes, UK 2020

Streaming on Netflix

Remember when director David Cronenberg used to make gory, sci-fi, tech thrillers about shady companies and existential philosophy? Well his son Brandon does, because he's keeping that flame alive with his new film *Possessor*. Holly is a contract killer who uses tech to implant her consciousness into others. Once she's in the driver's seat, so to speak, she can make that person murder whomever her shady bosses demand. This 'mind-control-assassin' plot is hardly new. You see it in 1980s thriller *Telefon* and an old episode of *Spider-Man*. And let's not forget the first *Naked Gun* movie with Ricardo Montalban hypnotising folks to kill the Queen. Yet *Possessor* wants us to consider the implications of murdering at will from the safety of a lab. Yes, even assassins are working from home, these days.

Holly can't just pop into a body and get stabbing – she must observe the innocent for a while and 'learn their life'. Then, when she finally inhabits them, she must spend a while living that life. Going to their work, attending their parties, having sex with their spouse. Holly is excellent at her work, but at what cost? A chilling moment sees her standing outside her own house, rehearsing what banal everyday things she should say to her child. Then she goes inside, and plays the part... of herself.

It's this fracturing of the mind (and the numbing



*It's this fracturing of the mind that gives the film its lasting horror*

effect it creates) that gives *Possessor* its lasting horror. Oh, and the ending. Viewers should be advised that the subtitle of this film reads: "Uncut" – which is worth bearing in mind if you're of a sensitive disposition. In fact, there were moments where the ultraviolence seemed too much. Not necessarily in an offensive way, but in the sense of being over-the-top – like Lucio Fulci at



his most 'let's zoom-in-when-the-eye-pops-out!' extreme, which somehow undermines any sense of reality. But then I thought about the film afterwards and slapped my own hand. That's precisely the point the film is trying to make, fool!

In *His House* a refugee couple face a nightmare journey when fleeing South Sudan to seek asylum in England. After many months in detention, they're finally allowed to live in a run-down council estate. They're told they must 'fit in' and 'not make a fuss', which isn't easy when their designated house is possessed by an African demon that has followed them. It's scary, sure, but director Remi Weekes brings heart too. The government officials, headed by Matt Smith, could have been stereotypes. They're not. They're real people trying to help even though they are part of the 'system'. Yet the key is this lovely, haunted couple. Early on the husband wakes from a nightmare but he doesn't want to worry his wife. "I was just dreaming of our wedding," he says. She laughs back: "That explains the screams." It's a tiny moment, but it captures two people clinging to love and humour in the midst of horror – even before the demon turns up.

The fact that *His House* is being touted as 'refreshing' and 'novel' is welcome, of course. But it should give some of us movie fans pause for thought, too. Let's face it, it's not that refugees from Africa and elsewhere have only just started arriving in the UK in 2020. Yet, their stories (including the scary ones) haven't been given much airtime. Horror has been a predominantly white, Western, Christian-centric landscape, after all. To see this sweet couple facing a demonic presence is scary, but the biggest emotion I felt was heartbreak and empathy for the millions of real-life nightmares this film simply echoes.

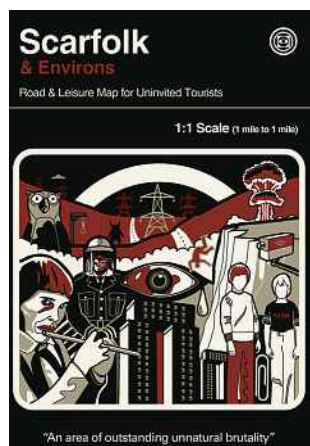
# THE HAUNTED GENERATION

BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY...



"It's a map for people who aren't allowed outside," explains Richard Littler. "That said, I'm sure many people wouldn't *want* to venture outside, given what awaits them on the streets of Scarfolk..." Richard is, of course, the artist and writer whose sprawling multi-media project documents life in the maladjusted town of Scarfolk, a rabies-obsessed dystopia stuck in a nightmarish 1970s timewarp. We're discussing the beautifully-illustrated Scarfolk map, a spoof Tourist Information guide to such locations as the Demon's Abyss Housing Estate, the Cooling Tower Coven and the OAP Recycling Centre. It comes complete with barbed wire postcard ("Gateway to Europe") and "Outsider Visa", and continues Littler's drift towards using the unsettling tropes of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to satirise current political events.

"The Scarfolk Twitter account is now followed by high-ranking cabinet ministers, and more than a few people



have noticed the similarity between Scarfolk's dystopian public information and genuine government messaging over the past few months," he chuckles. "Personally, I think Scarfolk's guidance might be a bit more coherent..." The package is available from [herblester.com](http://herblester.com), and HM Government's Covid response is further lampooned with a range of pandemic-themed Scarfolk beermats (pint of Super Spreader, anyone?) sold through [saatchigallery.com](http://saatchigallery.com).

Meanwhile, the woozy synth soundtrack to Richard's alarming 1970s-style animation *Dick and Stewart* (see FT387:68-69), composed by Cold War-obsessed Chris "Concretism" Sharp, has now been issued by the Castles in Space label. The label has been in terrific form all year, and *Dick and Stewart* is part of a triptych of winter releases that should warm the cockles of any blissfully disquieted nostalgist. In addition, there's *Six Twenty Negative*, an utterly joyous new LP by The Twelve Hour Foundation. Jez Butler and Polly Hulse create staggeringly accurate tributes to the Moog-drenched, radiophonic library music of the mid-1970s, and the album is brimming with gleeful melodic invention.

And there's great fun to be had with *Scarred for Life 2*, a second sumptuous double vinyl compilation of themes to imaginary TV shows of the 1970s. Highlights include 'The Day Before Doomsday', Cult of Wedge's strident electronic

soundtrack to a hitherto unnoticed West Midlands nuclear apocalypse, and 'What's In The Box', Handspan's homage to the waltzing, discordant theme of unsettling ITV daytime staple *Picture Box*. All three records are available from [castlesinspace.com](http://castlesinspace.com), and the label's new subscription service is well worth investigating too.

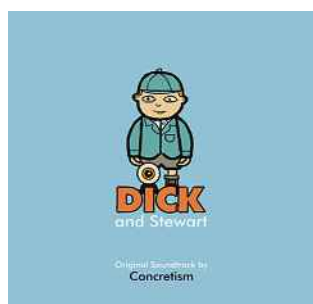
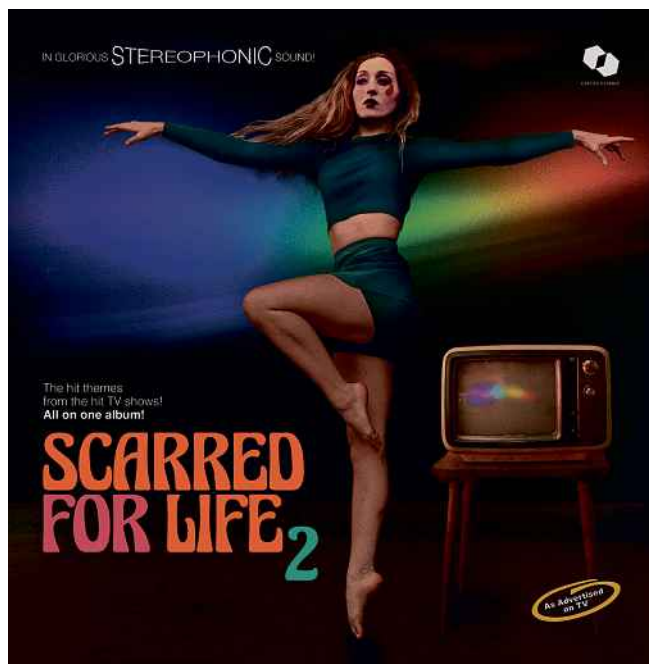
Also contributing to this latter album is South Yorkshire musician Mat "Pulselovers" Handley, whose Woodford Halse label continues to plough a fascinating furrow. December's releases include the immersive *Formic Kingdom* by modular synth supremo Field Lines Cartographer, an album influenced largely by cult 1974 ant-based sci-fi flick *Phase IV*. Less insect-heavy is *Last Witnesses*, an album of experimental synth workouts by Dogs Versus Shadows, inspired by Svetlana Alexievich's 1985 collection of childhood memories from the wartime Soviet Union. Dogs Versus Shadows is the musical

incarnation of Lee Pylon, whose *Kites and Pylons* radio show continues to be an eclectic delight. Visit [kitesandpylons.com](http://kitesandpylons.com) for the wireless, and [woodfordhalse.bandcamp.com](http://woodfordhalse.bandcamp.com) for the records.

Meanwhile, forteans might be interested in The Left Outsides' musical exploration of the infamous Moberly-Jourdain incident (see FT278:30-35). In 1901, Charlotte Anne Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain claimed to have experienced a timeslip to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in the grounds of the Palace of Versailles, leading to an encounter with Marie Antoinette. 'The Wind No Longer Stirs the Trees', the opening track of new album *Are You Sure I Was There*, is the song in question, and is the gateway to a splendid collection of psychedelic garage-folk. "I found the whole concept fascinating," explains singer Alison Cotton. "How the whole atmosphere changed when they entered this other time, how everything became flat and lifeless... I wanted to capture that feeling in song." The album is available from [thefortoutsides.bandcamp.com](http://thefortoutsides.bandcamp.com).

Similarly delving into the realms of traditional forteana is Neil Scrivin, in his guise as The Night Monitor. His new album *Spacemen Mystery of the Terror Triangle* uses analogue synths and snippets of authentic eyewitness interviews to explore "The Dyfed Triangle" – a series of bizarre 1977 South Wales UFO encounters that caught the imagination of the youthful Neil. "My interest goes back to reading about it in *The Unexplained* magazine," he says. "The case is filled with inspiring imagery – spacemen seen at remote farmhouse windows and saucers landing near 1970s school playgrounds. It's a potent mix of the mundane and mysterious". Head to [thenightmonitor.bandcamp.com](http://thenightmonitor.bandcamp.com).

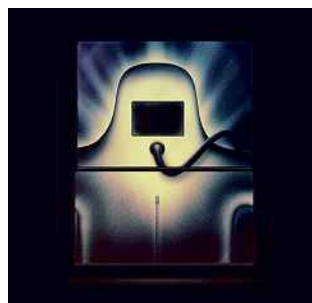
Neil's recollections also act as a reminder that two original artefacts of the traditional haunted era are now available to revisit. Usborne Publishing's legendary 1977 *UFOs* book, by Ted Wilding-White, has been reissued with a new foreword by avowed saucer enthusiast John Culshaw. It follows hot on the heels of a successful 2019 reprint for fellow school library



staple *Ghosts* (See FT385:32-37) and the book is just as engaging as its predecessor. Where else can one find detailed speculation about the home planet of the "Hopkinsville Goblin" that terrorised a family in 1950s Kentucky?

And square-eyed folk horror aficionados may be drawn to *Play for Today: Volume 1*, a new BFI Blu-ray that brings together seven vintage instalments of the long-running BBC series. Notably, it includes 1977's 'A Photograph', John Bowen's loose sequel to his notoriously unsettling 1970 entry in the canon, 'Robin Redbreast'. When an unexplained photograph of two mysterious women beside a traditional Romany caravan is sent to the home of a bemused arts journalist (John Stride) and his suspicious wife (*Juliet Bravo*'s Stephanie Turner), it leads to a web of rural terror, where – of course – the "old ways" look set to prevail.

A less distressing but no less affecting sense of the bucolic can be gleaned from a new spoken word project by poet Nancy Gaffield, recorded in collaboration with Kent-based



band The Drift. *Wealden* is an exploration of the county's shifting, transitory shingle coastline, released as an album with an accompanying 28-page pamphlet. A strong connection to place is rendered all the more profound by the impermanence of that landscape. Head to [thedriftband.bandcamp.com](http://thedriftband.bandcamp.com). I can also highly recommend *Yarmouth*, a new album by Tindersticks founder member David Boulter. Inspired by his 1970s childhood trips to this Norfolk resort, it's a jazz-tinged, Lowrey organ-fuelled encapsulation of that exquisite sense of summer holiday stillness. A second vinyl pressing is available to pre-order from [claypipemusic.com](http://claypipemusic.com).

Drifting into the world of the literary, The Sodality of the Shadows are a noir-tinged musical collective who take both name and influence from the esoteric (i.e. boozy) society founded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by writer Arthur Machen and occultist AE Waite. Their album *Phantom Cities* is riddled with the music of the night: drifting organs, twangy

guitars and offbeat percussion all accompany Rosalie Parker's occasional spoken word recitations, and the sumptuous vinyl edition comes with a booklet of accompanying prose. Visit [rbrussell.bandcamp.com](http://rbrussell.bandcamp.com).

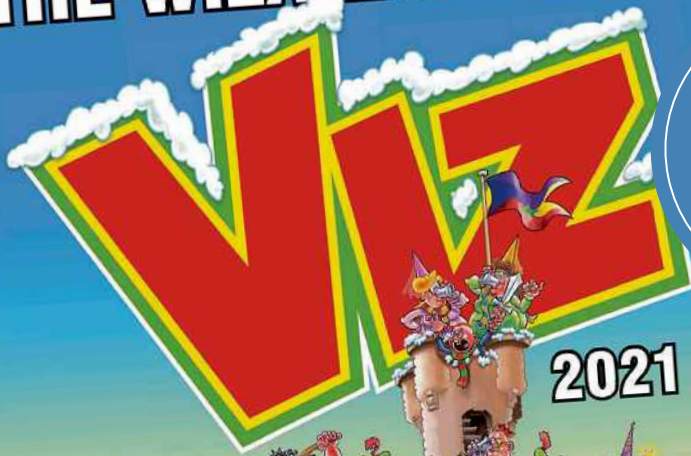
Meanwhile, the throbbing electronica of Nick Edwards underscores David "Dolly Dolly" Yates's atmospheric reading of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Raven*, on a new album by Holy Moloch. When I last saw David in action, he was entrancing an audience deep underground in the Kelvedon Hatch nuclear bunker in Essex (see FT379:30-36), and he remains a captivating presence. The album is available from [holymoloch.bandcamp.com](http://holymoloch.bandcamp.com).

And, from the world of supernatural fiction, I can recommend Will Maclean's new novel *The Apparition Phase*, published by Heinemann. Set in early 1970s Suffolk, it's a riot of references that will thrill the disquieted children of the era: the opening chapters alone namecheck *Doctor Who*, Borley Rectory, *The Stone Tape*, the Ghost Monk of Newby and the BBC's classic 1972 *Ghost Story for Christmas*, 'A Warning to the Curious'. But these are merely the trimmings of a twisting and chilling story. It recounts the disturbing tale of proto-Goth teenage twins Tim and Abi Smith, who – passing the time in a family attic converted into their own macabre bolthole of supernatural books and Victorian taxidermy – decide to fake a photograph of a ghost and use it to spook their ostracised classmate Janice Tupp. Hoping for a mild tabloid furor and some passing notoriety, they are jolted out of their self-satisfied superiority when Janice faints and injures herself in class, and – on a subsequent visit to the attic – turns out to have unlikely contacts beyond the veil. "I see you..." she warns. "I see the broken house with all the broken people in it. I see it coming back for you..." The twins' prank, she claims, has unleashed a *genuine* ghost. And then Abi vanishes... The book is both unsettling and compelling, and – I'd venture – the perfect *Ghost Story for Christmas 2020*.

Visit [www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk](http://www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk), or find me on Twitter... @bob\_fischer.

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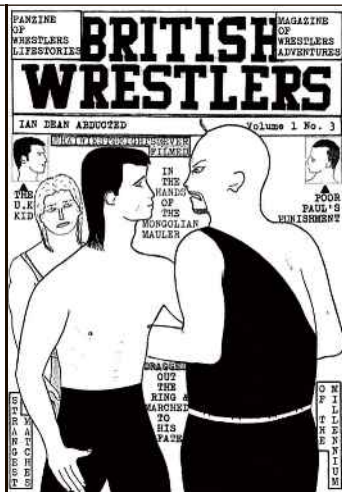
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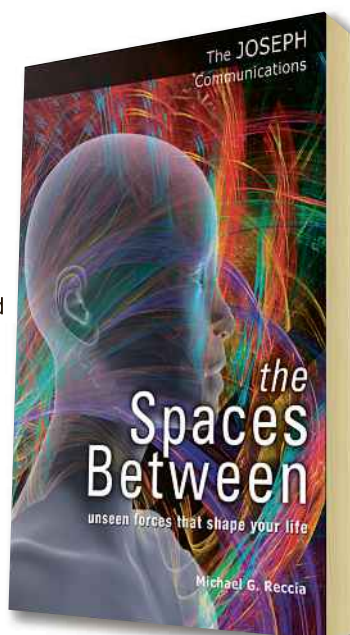
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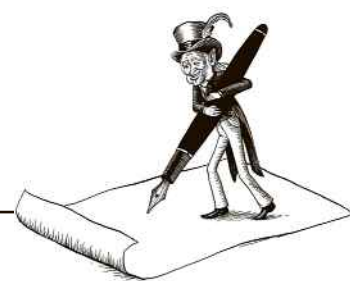


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# LETTERS

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## Cars out of time

I was surprised to read Ken Meaux's letter about a 'Car out of time' [FT397:72], describing how a Louisiana motorist on the highway drew level with an old car with 1940 number plates "in showroom condition", with a similarly dated driver and passenger wearing 1940s apparel. This got me wondering whether highways and motorways are particularly vulnerable to this kind of time warp, where a driver from the past, and another from the present, can both see each other and become mutually startled.

I mentioned two similar strange events in my book *Our Holographic World* (2014). The first occurred in 1991 when 'Max' was driving his family home from an outing in Lake George in New York State, when he was slowed by a dawdling old Chevrolet sedan with 1941 licence plates. Max tooted his horn, only to make the driver of the Chevy turn round abruptly in his seat. In fact the other driver looked genuinely shocked, imagining that he was driving all alone on the highway.

Similarly in 1997 an Australian woman motorist was transported back to about 1950. The tar-macked road became a dirt road, and the trees had gone. Then an old black car crossed an intersection in front of her, and the driver "was looking back at me in total astonishment before he accelerated". From what she could see, he was dressed in 1950s fashion, complete with hat.

**Anthony Milne**  
London

## Bananas

Regarding 'Icelandic bananas' [Mythconceptions #251, FT395:25]: the banana is a tropical plant and I doubt that it'll fruit much anywhere in Europe enough to make plantations commercially viable. (That's excluding the Canary Islands, which are so far south that they must geographically be an African archipelago, although culturally European.) Of course there are lots of types of banana and you can grow the Japanese banana outdoors in England, but if it fruits in a hot

## SIMULACRA CORNER



Joe Blunden spotted this tree root elephant on a recent visit to Devon, commenting: "I didn't know there were winged elephants as well as winged cats."

*We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 66598, London N11 9EN or to [sieveking@forteantimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com).*

summer the fruit doesn't taste very nice. You also sometimes see Abyssinian bananas outdoors in England, but they won't fruit.

A thought about Iceland: wouldn't the endless daylight of summer make up for the lack of winter light – but perhaps bananas don't work like that? I know that they have experimented with the Windmill Palm in Iceland and the Faroe Islands, but it's a different kettle of fish as it's very hardy, even surviving down to minus 32°C in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

**Kevan Hubbard**  
Seaton Carew, Co Durham

## False memory

I wholly endorse the basic concept of Brian J Robb's suggestion [FT394:32-38] that reality may be distorted, even illusory, Matrix and *Truman Show*-like, gnostic and for-  
tean, with conspira-

cies, time slips and all manner of weird shit. I've just read an article in the *Sun* (24 July 2020) on the replacement of the late AC/DC singer Bon Scott with Brian Johnson. I could have sworn that Johnson was their chief roadie, knew all the songs and seamlessly slipped into the role. Not so: he was a stranger who auditioned.

**Paul Screeton**  
Seaton Carew, Co. Durham

## Rat imposture

Re the Biggest Rat in the World, exhibited at a funfair near London in 1937 ['Misleading promotion' FT397:70] – my mother may have observed the same phenomenon some 12 years later. She told me that when she was in her late teens – that would have made it around 1949 or 1950 – she went to the funfair on Hampstead Heath (she lived round the corner in Downshire Hill). In the funfair there was a tent

advertising the world's biggest rat. I seem to remember my mum telling me there was a barker outside bringing punters in to see it, for a modest price of admission. My mum, who was already keen on natural history and about to start a degree in zoology at Somerville College, Oxford, told me she paid her money and went into the tent – and immediately told the organisers, that's not a rat, that's a coypu. They were most displeased and threw her out.

**Matt Salusbury**  
London

## Deer legs

Regarding the severed deer legs reported in Lincolnshire [FT393:17]: poachers do this when they have killed a deer. I once saw four deer legs that had been severed below the knee and thrown on a roadside near where I live.

**E Bailey**  
Aunsby, Lincolnshire



## Risley & Solway silver men

Glen Vaudrey's 'solution' to the Silver Man Mystery [FT:397:36-41] seems plausible at first glance. However, I'm not entirely convinced.

My basic problem with his explanation is that it relies for its credibility on a single, anonymous, source: the ex-fireman, who by his own admission, didn't commence duties at the site until 10 years after the events took place. We can't regard this person as a witness in the case. At best, anything he told Vaudrey would have been based on 40-year-old unsubstantiated hearsay. So, how accurate are the tales of the mysterious 'Big John' and his silver suit?

Vaudrey himself states that, "as the event happened 40 years ago, there would be no comeback for the people involved." In that case, why doesn't his source name 'Big John'? Why does the source himself wish to remain anonymous, when he wasn't even involved in the hoax (if that's what it was)?

I went back to the original investigation, as detailed by Jenny Randles and Peter Hough in their book, *Scary Stories: A Supernatural Yearbook* (Futura 1991). This account contains many details either not included in Vaudrey's article or which contradict statements made in it.

Let's begin with the insinuation that Ken Edwards was drunk behind the wheel of his van when the incident took place. According to Randles & Hough, Edwards "had had little to drink (at his union meeting), having to face the forty-minute drive home afterwards." Edwards freely admitted to drinking a large whisky that night (described by his wife, Barbara, as "uncharacteristic"), but only *after* he'd reached home. As for the statement that Edwards was "as pissed as a newt",



## Was 'Big John' at it again, in daylight this time?

attributed by Vaudrey to an unnamed policeman, again, this is unsubstantiated hearsay. Without the evidence of a breathalyser-test, this can only be a subjective opinion – and in any case, could only apply to Edwards's condition *after* his experience, not before it.

As to the actual events on Daten Avenue that night, Randles & Hough record Edwards as stating that he watched the figure as it came down a steep embankment to his right (not to his left, as in Vaudrey's article). What made this even more startling was that it was descending at *right angles* to the ground, an impossible feat, even for someone of 'Big John's' legendary abilities. Its

arms were said to protrude from the top of its shoulders (again, not 'coming out of its chest', as per Vaudrey). Edwards described the figure as being mostly silver, with a black head shaped like a goldfish-bowl. I searched the Internet for both fire and radiation protective-suits from the 1950s up till present-day, and could find nothing with a black helmet of that shape.

I find it telling that when police later pulled their stunt of a man in a silver fire-suit and suggested this is what Edwards saw, his reaction was a calm, "Nope. Nothing like it." If what Edwards saw that night was only 'Big John' in his silver suit, I think it likely he would have acknowledged a similarity, at least – but he didn't.

Quoting from Edwards's statement, Randles & Hough tell us that the figure stopped in the middle of the road and its head swivelled towards the van. It had what resembled

eyes, "set at the top of its head," from which projected two "pencil-slim beams of light." These beams penetrated the windscreen, leaving burn-marks, like sunburn, on the fingers of Edwards's right hand, which was clutching the steering wheel. This doesn't sound like the harmless reflections from a visor, as in Vaudrey's account.

Then we come to a crucial point: did the figure really walk straight through a chain-link fence? Here, Vaudrey (or rather, his source) tells us that there was a gate in the fence. While this is a plausible explanation, I find it curious that no mention seems to have been made of this gate by anyone else at the time. Both the UKAEA and civil police are said to have made a thorough search of the area, in broad daylight. Randles & Hough presumably did the same, as have, no doubt, several other people (including Edwards himself), up until the fence was demolished. But still, no mention of it.

The notion that the UKAEA police conspired with their fire service 'colleagues' to protect 'Big John' from disciplinary action doesn't ring true. If this was a fire-service hoax, then it made both the UKAEA and civil police look like incompetent buffoons, because they couldn't solve it. If all police officers can be said to have one thing in common, it's that they resent being made to look foolish. I would have thought the existence of a gate would have been seized upon at the time, as a solution to the 'alien-ghost' theories. Why wasn't it?

There are other strange aspects to this story, unmentioned in Vaudrey's article. According to Randles & Hough, Edwards was very familiar with the journey he made that night, having driven the route many times. He left the union meeting at 11pm and took his usual exit from the M62 motorway 30 minutes later. From



that point, he would expect to arrive home around 11.45pm at the latest. To Edwards, the encounter seemed to last just a few minutes, yet he didn't reach home until 12.30am – three quarters of an hour after leaving the motorway. What happened during those missing 45 minutes? Did he just sit in his van, possibly in shock? Not according to the vehicle's fuel gauge. Edwards stated that he didn't switch the van's engine off at any point, yet the gauge showed no consequent drop in fuel level, even for an idling engine.

On the Monday morning following his experience, Edwards tried to use the radio transceiver in the van, but it wouldn't work. Company electricians, we are told, examined the radio and were mystified to find that an enormous power surge, possibly through the aerial, had burned out the entire transmitting circuit. The unit was beyond repair and had to be scrapped. Could 'Big John's' reflective visor have created such damage? I hardly think so.

The night of 17 March 1978 would not be the last time Edwards would see the 'silver man'. Randles & Hough tell us that six days after his initial encounter, he revisited the site at the request of a UFO investigator from Leeds. While there, Edwards began to feel dizzy. From the corner of his eye he glimpsed the figure again, though only for a few moments. Was 'Big John' at it again, in daylight this time (and had he added the ability to disappear to his repertoire of skills)?

Less than a year after these events, Edwards fell seriously ill and was diagnosed with cancer of the kidneys. In early 1980 he underwent emergency surgery, which at first was thought to be successful. However, within a few months he developed cancer of the throat, which eventually took his life in 1982.

Was Edwards's illness the result of whatever energy source burned his fingers and fried his radio? We will never know.

But I'm certain of one thing: a 'joker' in a silver suit couldn't be responsible for these effects. That leaves one chilling possibility: even if the tales of 'Big John' are true, might there have been another, less benign life form haunting that lonely road on a dark night in 1978?

**Andy Robertson**  
*Lancaster, Lancashire*

Something not mentioned in Vaudrey's article is researcher/author Peter Paget's comments in his excellent book *The Welsh Triangle*, where he relates other tall silver-suited being accounts. Regarding Ken Edwards: when the being passed through the perimeter fence, at the very same instant a huge power overload burnt out most of the capacitors and all of the transmitting diode circuit in his mobile two-way radio fitted in the service van (p.150). It's understandable that some people can only perceive the practical joke scenario, but there have been many other reports of similar beings, probably all connected.

In 1977 schoolchildren and many locals in St Brides Bay, Wales, saw tall, silver-suited beings wearing visors around coastal paths and fields, occasionally levitating. Perhaps pertinently there was a NATO base at RAF Brawdy close by, originally a Navy base before the RAF took over in 1971. It then became a joint RAF/American base rumoured to have deep underground facilities. I met Mrs Rosa Granville, owner of the Haven Fort Hotel in Broad Haven, three times in four years. She told me that she saw two floating, long-limbed 'men' in protective white suits and visors above a field from a hotel window. They appeared to be looking for something. When she reported this she was visited by a RAF Captain who asked her not to tell anyone as she

probably wouldn't see the figures again (implying some sort of control over the situation). But, if she did she was to ring the phone number he gave her.

UFO researchers Philip Mantle and Mark Birdsall investigated a 1979 report from a Mrs Westerman, who with her children had witnessed the landing of a UFO in a field in Normanton, near Wakefield, West Yorkshire. Next to the 'Mexican hat' craft stood three very tall men all dressed in silver suits with visors and gloves. Their movements were slow and precise.

**Mike Prentis**  
*Nottingham*

I read the article on the Risley silver man mystery with interest. I'm not sure why Jim Templeton's Solway spaceman photo was dragged out again (incidentally from 23 May 1964 not 1963 as stated). Most people now

accept this was an overexposed photo of the back of Templeton's wife.

It might have been more relevant to mention other more contemporary sightings of silver men, such as the figures seen at Frodsham (less than 20 miles from Risley) by poachers on 27 January 1978.

These figures were apparently seen emerging from their craft and for some reason placing a cow in a cage (*FSR* vol.26/no.3, 1980). Then there were the famous Broad Haven sightings from the previous year, 1977, where tall silver-suited figures terrorised residents at the Haven Fort Hotel and Ripperston Farm. These humanoid sightings were also put down to being the work of a local prankster in a fire-resistant suit.

**Mike Foster**  
*Stockport, Cheshire*

I showed the Solway spaceman photo to my wife for her opinion. To her it looked like a kite. She

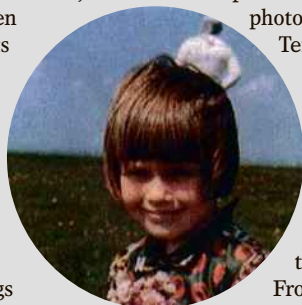
pointed out that to the right of the 'spaceman', at the same level, there were what looked like thin ribbons, often a feature of kite design. So it could have been a kite photographed at an unusual angle as it blew about and descended quickly, after which it could have landed suddenly, so there was no sight of it on the ground from the position of the girl and her father because they are on top of a knoll. In addition, the kite flyer could have been out of range or behind a rise in the landscape, as kites can travel some distance.

**Eric Fitch**  
*Hereford*

**Jenny Randles comments:**  
*I saw statements from the Frodsham poachers at the time, but I never got to talk to them. I think the encounter was almost certainly a hoax, though I could never prove it.*

*As for the over-exposure of Jim Templeton's wife, I can see why some like it as an explanation. I did discuss this with her 25 years ago at her home even before it was seriously proposed, and long before recent attempts to photo-assess that option. She was adamant she never stepped into that position. She was looking after the other child present and they both stayed behind the camera, knowing that her husband's photography was important to him and in those days spoiling a shot was a big deal. I guess it will never be settled one way or another – but it is worth noting that I asked both of them about it before it became a popular theory, and both denied it had happened that way.*

*I don't recall anyone suggesting the kite idea. Again, of course, it can never be ruled out – but it seems pretty unlikely that with two adults and two children present, none of them noticed someone with a kite. It is unlikely the kite would just be there for a second or two. This was a wide-open area with people in view for a while, not just fleetingly.*





## Ghostly bird

*Coming into my back room on Saturday (12 September 2020), I was met by a ghostly apparition on the window. If you look carefully there is a second strike next to it. Living in a wooded area, we do get the occasional bird strike, but this was the most complete I have seen. It must have given the bird quite a headache. There's no sign of a body, so I assume it managed to fly off. It was possibly a wood pigeon.*

**Terry Warburton** Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire

## Lovecraft apologia

In "HP Lovecraft in Brooklyn" [FT396:36], Gary Lachman describes Lovecraft by using the terms "racism" and "xenophobia" as if they are synonyms. I would argue that while racists might be described as xenophobic, the inverse is not necessarily true and, in Lovecraft's case – despising anyone "non-Nordic" but marrying a Ukrainian Jew – is misleading. To describe a kleptomaniac as a thief, to criticise a Tourette's sufferer for their potty-mouth or to assume that someone has a poor memory because they have to check that the hall light is off 13 times before settling down to watch TV or go shopping are similarly simplistic. In a sense, they all describe aspects of conditions with a degree of correctness but are quite poor in helping to define them.

Lovecraft, as revealed in his own letters quoted by Lachman, seems to have suffered

clinical reactions when he found himself in the midst of the NY "mongrel herd"; Sonia, his wife, remarking that he would "become livid with rage" and "almost lose his mind" walking through the racially mixed street crowds. Elsewhere, he happily states that one of his hopes was for a "kindly gush of cyanogen" that would "asphyxiate the whole gigantic abortion and... clean out the place." Racists might indeed agree with him, but these first-hand observations mark Lovecraft's condition as clinical rather than cultural, pathological rather than political and unbidden rather than as the result of cold deliberation: the hallmarks of a mentally ill person rather than a mere social deviant.

None of this excuses the repulsive sentiments Lovecraft expressed, of course; but just as we, as much as we might desire not to, recognise that the OCD sufferer, the kleptomaniac and

people with Tourette's syndrome cannot be judged in the same way that we might judge our own behaviour, condemning HP Lovecraft as simply a "racist" seems rather cruel in its oversimplification.

**Robert T Walker**

Wagga Wagga, New South Wales

## Spanish Civil War

The recent article on the experiences of nursing staff and what their dying patients appear to experience [FT398:40-45] reminded me of what a Spanish doctor who worked with me on an NHS ward told me. When she was caring for Spanish Civil War veterans who were in end-of-life care, those who fought for Franco always seemed to be afraid of dying. Many would report seeing their victims of the atrocities they took part in during the war and the subsequent brutal suppression of the Spanish left after the fascist victory of 1939. They would often scream

about being haunted by the ghosts of those they had killed. By contrast, those who fought for the Republic, socialists and communists alike, seemed to be both emotional and cheerful to be reunited with relatives, friends and comrades who had predeceased them. They often went out laughing as if they had experienced a joyful reunion.

**Phil Brand**

London

## Function of ceremony

In 1966 I had my house built in this village [Swallowcliffe]. When my grandfather had his house built in 1912 near Milford Haven, he buried a horse skull in the north foundations corner. I couldn't find a skull, but I did have a tooth, so I did the same. The labourers stood politely in rows and some crossed themselves. Nobody appeared to think it odd. There is some talk in the family (now mostly forgotten) of 'Horse Lords'.

It seems to me that humans instinctively like to continue traditions. Confucius believed that ceremony was the glue that held communities together. I am a scientist and not particularly superstitious, but this explains why some things like witch bottles continue long past their emotional need.

**Patrick James**

Swallowcliffe, Wiltshire

## Ho hum

Following your five-star review [FT394:63], I recently purchased Anna Merlan's *Republic of Lies: American Conspiracy Theorists and their Surprising Rise to Power*. Within an hour of starting to read the (excellent) book, I was disturbed by an all-pervasive and physically unpleasant low-pitched drone or hum, which lasted about 48 hours. My husband couldn't hear or feel it. The next morning, one of my dogs tried to destroy the book.

Coincidence? (Probably, but where's the fun in that?)

**Kirsten Baron**

Reigate, Surrey

## Many Worlds

Gavin Lloyd Wilson [FT396:72] is not the first to hypothesise the “splinter universe” death-avoidance hypothesis. *Is There Life After Death?: The Extraordinary Science of What Happens When We Die*, by Anthony Peake (Arcturus, 2009) explores this subject.

**Dave Saunders**  
By email

The article on the Mandela Effect sparked a thought about a non-psychological solution to the problem: the many worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics (QM). I have never felt comfortable with the idea of the Universe “splitting” each time a decision is made, but I considered an alternative where all possible universes already exist in the form of the probabilistic wave-function and that particles (and us) navigate through the available probable outcomes of the Universe based upon our past experiences. Mathematically, this would be identical to all of the other interpretations of QM, as far as I can tell. Assuming that there is a law for conservation of universes as there is for energy, charge and other forces, thus meaning that two completely identical universes cannot co-exist, it is possible that two travellers from similar but subtly different past probabilities could end up in the same probability space of our current Universe. This would allow for differing memories – for instance, the death of Mandela in one reality – but would explain why they are experiencing the same reality now.

Although my background is in physics I am more of an experimenter and would appreciate any input on this theory from someone with a better theoretical understanding than myself. Nevertheless, it does offer a possible physical explanation for

this phenomenon.

**Dave Black, PhD MinstP**  
By email

## Inside the Earth

While the theory of the Hollow Earth is the main ‘competitor’ for the Flat Earth movement, we should not forget Dr Cyrus Teed (1839-1908) and his theory that rather than the Earth being even hollow (let alone flat) it was in fact inverted – that we were living on the inside of a globe. The Sun is somehow just a battery-powered thing that presumably moves around and turns itself off (I can find little on my cursory searches).

“According to Teed’s cosmology the sun, moon, stars – indeed

everything we can see – are inside the earth and outside there is nothing. It was all quite literally a womb – that of the earth goddess [whom he had seen in a vision]”. (From *Bizarism – Strange Lives, Cults, Celebrated Lunacy* by Chris Mikul, Critical Vision, 1999)

After Teed’s death his idea about being

inside the globe was revived in Nazi Germany by Peter Bender – a former pilot from World War I who, it is said, counted Goering amongst his high level Nazi friends. In 1933 German engineers built a rocket to send vertically upwards – if the theory were correct it would land on the opposite side of the planet. On the day it misfired (but what if this was the moment that got the Nazis thinking about other rocket applications?) The German Navy – the same book reports – also investigated whether, with strong enough telescopes, they could see enemy ships over the horizon. What if the lights that twinkle in the night sky are simply the street lights of cities in the other hemisphere?

Anyway, nothing more than a curious side note that had a tragic ending for Bender – he and his family are thought to

have perished in a concentration camp.

**Bert Gray-Malkin**  
Portishead, Bristol

*Editor’s note: There is a chapter on Teed, known to his followers as Koresh, in John Michell’s wonderful book, Eccentric Lives and Peculiar Notions (1984), entitled “The community that dwelt within the Earth”, pp.41-50.*

## Astrology

Your report “Covid Astrology Boom” [FT394:4] makes dismal reading. The American astrologer Susan Miller not only failed to foresee the pandemic but also predicted a good time for most of us in 2020. Her remark about “a calendar full of international travel” is particularly inept when contrasted with newsreels of dozens of aircraft sitting unused on runways around the world.

Most issues covered by FT – ghosts, UFOs, strange beliefs and religions, anomalous happenings – exist on an uncertainty principle by which they can never be entirely proved or disproved. But astrology is a different matter. It can be satisfactorily debunked because it simply doesn’t work. Even people who check their ‘stars’ in a newspaper every morning mostly claim it’s just a bit of fun and don’t expect realistic guidance in their lives from horoscopes. And of course what guidance there is varies seriously from one horoscope to another: astrologers themselves squabble over how to interpret the signs, and forecasts are notoriously so vague as to be applicable to anyone, anywhere, at any time.

If astrological predictions even turned out to be 50 per cent confirmed, we might agree there’s something in it, even if we can’t understand how bodies millions or

even billions of miles away can enable inhabitants of this small planet to meet a new partner or make more money. It is probable that most human beings – even the terminally ill or those planning suicide – retain a flicker of interest in what’s due to happen to them next. This is what astrology latches onto, and perhaps explains why it’s flourishing during this pandemic. But it should be recognised as merely a creation of human hopes and fears, which lets down its followers in so many ways that it completely lacks credibility.

**MG Sherlock**  
Colwyn Bay, North Wales

## Animal EVP

Mackenzie King, dog lover and Spiritualist [FT398:51], would have appreciated an article by Anabela Cardoso (atransc.org/itc-animal-contacts/) about EVP messages from our furry or feathery friends. She introduces us to Nisha, a greatly loved Doberman which addressed her in her native Portuguese – Tuly, a dog which said, allegedly, “Moi, je comprends tout”; a Portuguese-speaking parrot named Lorinho; and Jakob, a crow that greeted its former owner, ITC pioneer Klaus Schreiber (presumably in German). Two things occur to me. Firstly, do creatures in the Hereafter have Elon Musk-style implants, enabling them to learn language? And secondly, does the lack of English-speaking communications indicate some kind of post mortem animal Brexit?

**Richard George**  
St Albans, Hertfordshire



“NICE TO SEE TRADITIONAL ART MAKING A COMEBACK.”

# PECULIAR POSTCARDS

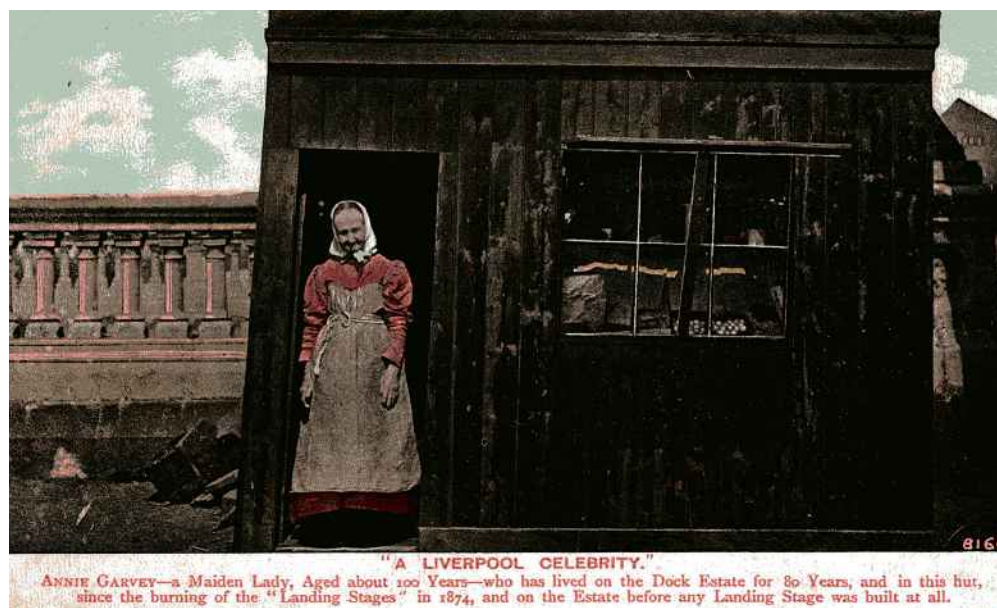
**JAN BONDESON** shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past celebrates an unusual urban hermit and one-time fixture of Liverpool Harbour.



## 10. A LIVERPOOL CELEBRITY

The postcard reproduced here is the major claim to fame of an obscure Liverpool hermit of Edwardian days, Annie Garvey, also known as the 'Pier-head Squatter'. Described as a maiden lady, about 100 years old, she had come to Liverpool from Craik in Armagh, Ireland, as a young girl, along with her mother. They had made their home in a shanty to the north of the floating bridge at the landing-stage in Liverpool Harbour, but they had to move when a permanent bridge was built. They erected a small hut on the floating bridge leading to the landing-stage, but the mother died soon after, allegedly from a broken heart after her original shanty had been demolished. For 40 years, Annie lived alone in her tiny hut, selling apples, oranges and confectionery. As Liverpool Harbour expanded, the Dock Board tried their best to evict Annie, but she refused to move. Some charitable people supported her, and they made sure she was supplied with victuals. These friends tried their best to have the stubborn old lady put into an old people's home, but Annie preferred to stay in her little wooden hut.

The photograph of Annie shows a woman, who certainly looks very old, although she is able to stand up without assistance. She was said to have one or two relations in Liverpool, but being of hermitical habits, she did not want anything to do with them. As a newspaper expressed it, "As may be imagined, she was a woman of great strength of mind and tenacity of purpose. She was a religious woman, and regularly attended Mass at St Mary's, Highfield Street,



ABOVE: Annie Garvey appears on an unposted card produced while the Liverpool celebrity was still alive. BELOW: A view of the landing-stage at Liverpool Harbour, from the *Wonder Book of Engineering*, 1931.

the clergy of which church took an interest in her physical as well as her spiritual welfare." In the 1910s, Annie became something of a local celebrity, and people often came to see her: "Her shanty was often visited by the curious, and the old lady is said to have received a goodly portion of her income from the contributions of such visitors. Many of the police and other officials of the Landing-stage knew her well, and among these the view was held that she was not as old as she was represented, or as she represented herself." And indeed, the 1911 Census gave her date of birth as 1826 and her age as 86, adding that she "Keeps small shop, sells confectionery at home. Postal address: shed on Riverside on George's Pierhead."

In May 1914, Annie left her hut one day to draw her old-



age pension. She collapsed in the street and was taken to the Northern Hospital in an unconscious state, the result of heart disease. In Liverpool Harbour, rumours circulated that Annie had died, but she made it out of the hospital alive, being transferred to the Brownlow Hill workhouse infirmary. On admission, she indignantly denied that she was a centenarian, claiming to be 86

years old, just as she had back in 1911; she rallied for a week or two, before suffering a relapse and dying. The workhouse officials advertised for her relations, but nobody seems to have come forward to claim the hermit's humble estate. Both the *Liverpool Echo* and the *Liverpool Catholic Herald* published her obituary, expressing regret that one of the quaint celebrities of Old Liverpool was no more.

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# WHY FORTEAN?



**FORTEAN TIMES** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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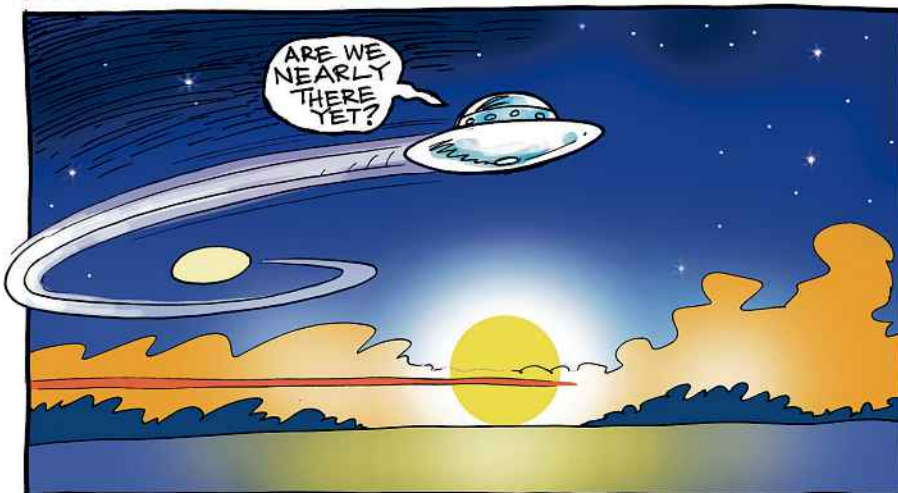
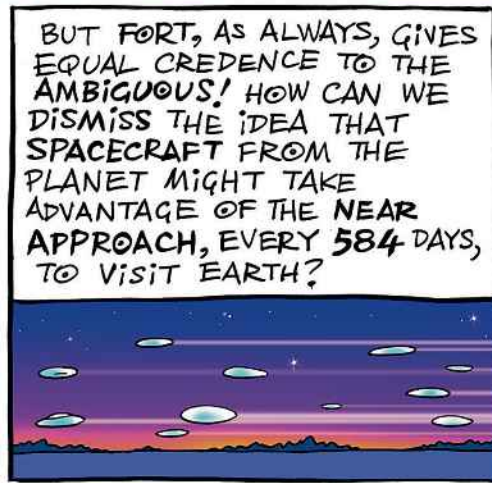
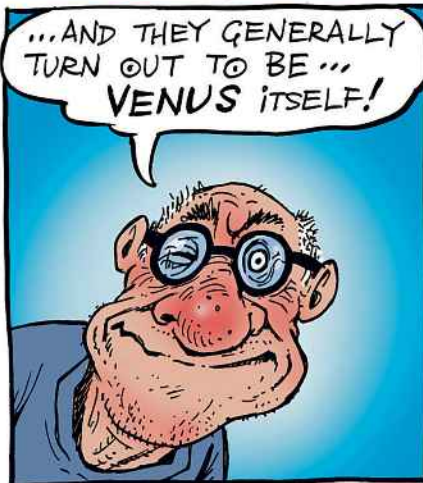
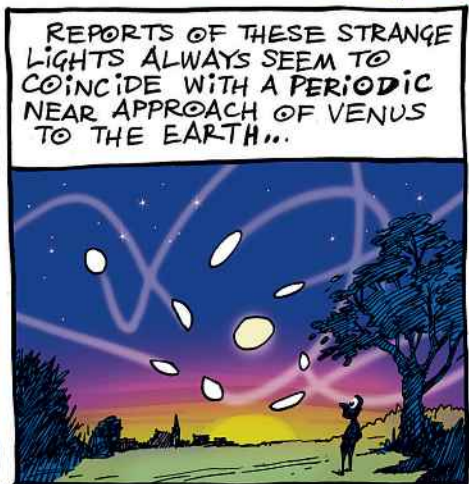
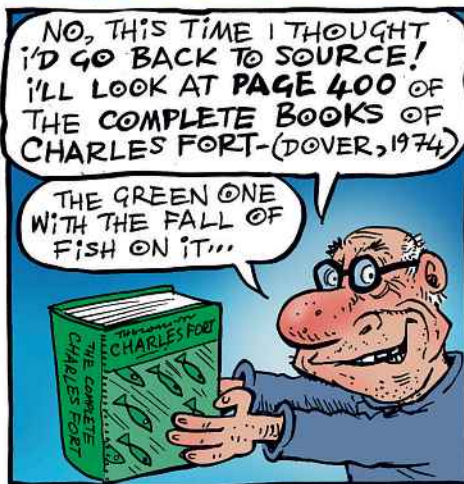
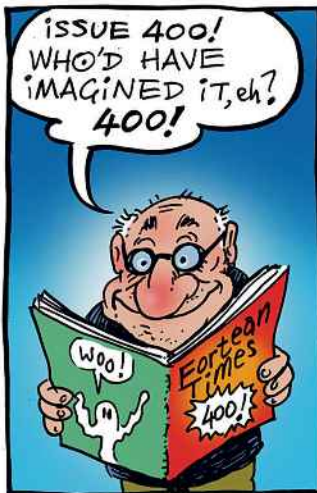
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# STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A Massachusetts construction worker died after eating one-and-a-half bags of black liquorice every day for several weeks. The 54-year-old had switched from red, fruit-flavoured twists to the black liquorice version a few weeks before his death last year. He collapsed while eating lunch at a fast-food restaurant. Emergency responders performed CPR and he revived, but died the next day. Doctors later discovered that the man had dangerously low potassium, which had led to heart arrhythmia and other problems. "Even a small amount of liquorice you eat can increase your blood pressure a little bit," said Dr Neel Butala, a cardiologist at Massachusetts General Hospital. Glycyrrhizic acid, found in black liquorice (and in many other foods and dietary supplements containing liquorice root extract) is the significant component. It can cause dangerously low potassium levels, as well as electrolyte imbalances.

Eating as little as two ounces (57g) of black liquorice each day for two weeks could cause a heart rhythm problem, especially for the over 40s. "It's more than liquorice sticks. It could be jelly beans, liquorice teas, a lot of things over the counter. Even some beers, like Belgian beers, have this compound in it, as do some chewing tobaccos," warned Dr Robert Eckel, a University of Colorado cardiologist and former American Heart Association president. *Independent*, 24 Sept 2020.

An alcoholic killer monkey left one man dead and 250 injured after going on a rampage in Uttar Pradesh, India. The six-year-old monkey, known as Kalua, had been the pet of a Mirzapur occultist who used to give him strong drink at home. But when the occultist died, the primate, deprived of his supply of spirits, began prowling the streets in a rage. He allegedly targeted women and girls in particular, with dozens of children left needing plastic surgery after the animal ripped open their faces. One man died from his injuries.

The miscreant has since been caught and will now be kept in captivity in Kanpur Zoo, Uttar Pradesh. Here, zookeepers discovered that the rogue simian was not only an alcoholic, but refused to eat vegetables. It is now thought that its occultist owner fed the monkey a strictly meat-based diet. It was also noted that Kalua tended to attack female zookeepers

and would target other monkeys if put in the same cage. Hence, he will be kept in solitary confinement for the remainder of his days.

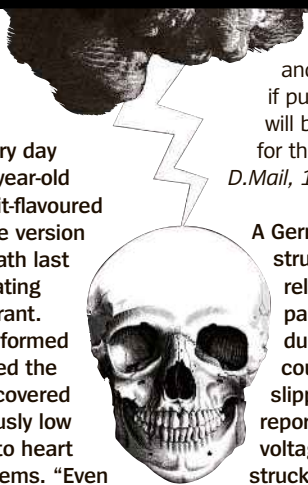
*D.Mail*, 18 June 2020.

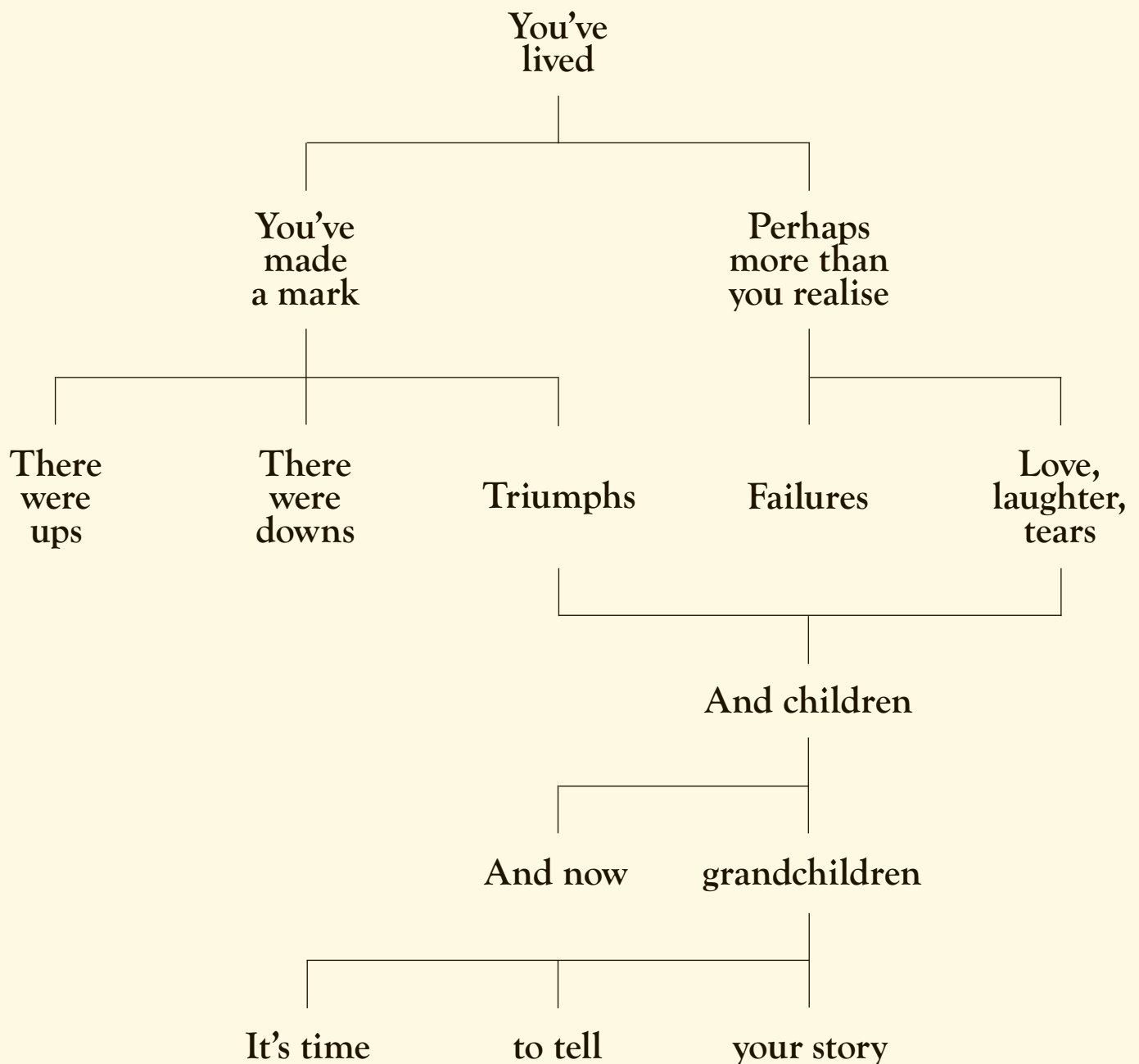
A German politician died after being struck by lightning as he was relieving himself at a garden party. A storm was underway during the barbecue when local councillor Nico K, 44, discreetly slipped away for a wee. He was reportedly standing under a high-voltage power line when lightning struck. Onlookers at the garden party, held in the village of Hoehnstedt in the northeastern German state of Saxony-Anhalt, tried in vain to resuscitate him, but he died at the scene. *D.Mail*, 15 June 2020.

A University College London researcher was burnt alive by an angry mob in Guatemala. Domingo Choc Che, an expert in natural medicine, was part of a pharmaceutical investigation team examining traditional plant-based medicines with the help of Mayan guides. Choc Che was himself both an expert in traditional medicine and a Mayan spiritual guide. He lived in the village of Chimay in northern Guatemala where the incident took place. He had apparently given some medicine to a sick villager who subsequently died, and an angry mob set upon him, blaming him for the death and accusing him of practising witchcraft. A video of the lynching shows him running through a field covered in flames as onlookers watch and chase after him. The regional governor told local media that villagers had blocked police officers from attending the scene to help Che, and impeded the subsequent investigation.

Monica Berger, head of the anthropology department at Guatemala's University of Valle said 'Abuelo Domingo' (Grandfather Domingo) had been collaborating on a project to recover natural ancestral Mayan medicine. "We were working on an inventory of medicinal species to document and protect Q'eqchi medicinal knowledge so that all the indigenous knowledge can be known." The British ambassador wrote on social media: "I recognise the legacy of Domingo Choc as a spiritual guide and send my condolences to his family. We trust that the state will carry out a swift investigation."

There have been at least 348 lynchings in Guatemala between 2008 and 2018. *D.Star*, 10 June 2020.





**Life**  
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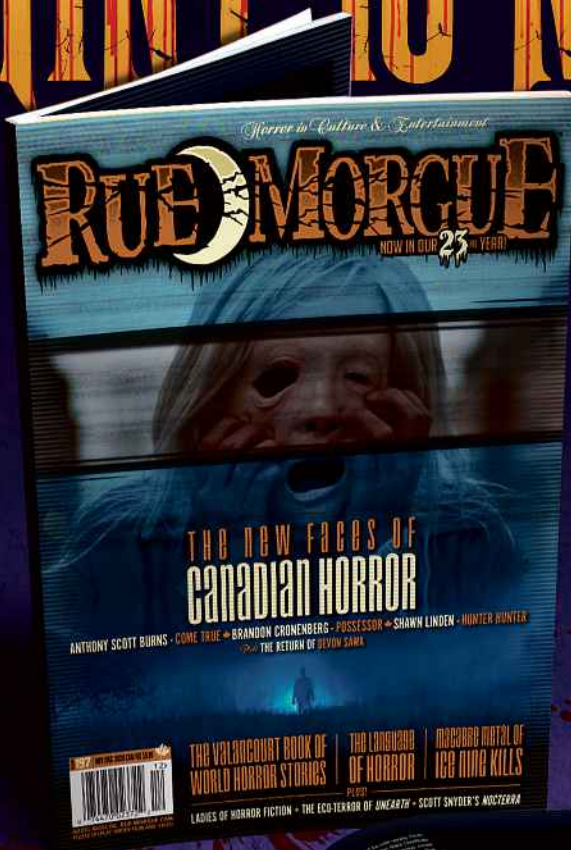
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